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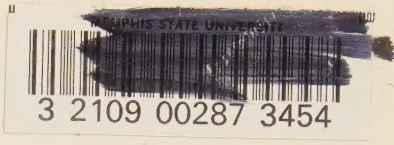

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PORTRAIT OF AUBREY BEARDSLEY
BY FREDERICK H. EVANS

AUBREY BEARDSLEY

THE EARLY WORK OF AUBREY BEARDSLEY

THE LATER WORK OF AUBREY BEARDSLEY

UNDER THE HILL, AND OTHER ESSAYS IN PROSE AND VERSE

THE UNCOLLECTED WORK OF AUBREY BEARDSLEY

John Lane The Bodley Head Limited

AUBREY BEARDSLEY

THE MAN AND HIS WORK

BY HALDANE MACFALL

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To EARL E. FISK

THIS SMALL TRIBUTE
TO A NOBLE COM-
RADESHIP
H. M.

Personal Note

It would ill become me to let this volume go forth to the public without the expression of my gratitude to the publishing house of John Lane at the Bodley Head for their kindly courtesy in lending me sufficient illustrations to show the development of the genius of Aubrey Beardsley from stage to stage; and to Mr. Frederick Evans for permission to use the best portrait that has come down to us of the early-doomed artist.

The chief mass of Beardsley's work—indeed its most important achievement—is in the hands of Messrs. Lane; but there are three large volumes in particular published by this house which give a very complete impression of the range and achievement of Aubrey Beardsley—the *Early Work*, the *Later Work*, and *The Uncollected Work of Aubrey Beardsley*. This rich mine should be in the possession of all who admire the art of one of the supreme masters in black and white.

H. M.

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Foreword

ABOUT the mid-July of 1894, a bust of Keats had been unveiled in Hampstead Church—the gift of the American admirers of the dead poet, who had been born to a livery-stable keeper at the Swan and Hoop on the Pavement at Finsbury a hundred years gone by—and there had foregathered within the church on the hill for the occasion the literary and artistic world of the 'nineties. As the congregation came pouring out of the church doors, a slender, gaunt young man broke away from the throng, and, hurrying across the graveyard, stumbled and lurched awkwardly over the green mounds of the sleeping dead. This stooping, dandified being was evidently intent on taking a short-cut out of God's acre. There was something strangely fantastic in the ungainly efforts at a dignified wayfaring over the mound-encumbered ground by the loose-limbed, lank figure so immaculately dressed in black cut-away coat and silk hat, who carried his lemon-yellow kid gloves in his long white hands, his lean wrists showing naked beyond his cuffs, his pallid, cadaverous face grimly set on avoiding falling over the embarrassing mounds that tripped his feet. He took off his hat to some lady who called to him, showing his "tortoiseshell" coloured hair, smoothed down and plastered over his forehead in a "quiff" almost to his eyes—then he stumbled on again. He stooped and stumbled so much and so awkwardly amongst the sleeping dead that I judged him short-sighted; but was mistaken—he was fighting for breath. It was Aubrey Beardsley.

The Yellow Book had been upon the town some three months. Beardsley, little more than twenty-one, had leaped into fame in a night. He was the talk of the town—was seen everywhere—was at the topmost height of a prodigious and feverish vogue. Before a year was out he was to be expelled from *The Yellow Book!* As he had come up, so he was to come down—like a rocket. For there was about to fall out of the blue the scandal that wrecked and destroyed Oscar Wilde; and for some fantastic, unjust reason, it was to lash at this early-doomed young dandy—fling him from *The Yellow Book*—and dim for him the splendour in which he was basking with such undis-

guised delight. Within a twelvemonth his sun was to have spluttered out; and he was to drop out of the public eye almost as though he had never been.

But, though we none of us knew it nor guessed it who were gathered there—and the whole literary and artistic world was gathered there—this young exquisite at twenty-three was to create within a year or so the masterpieces of his great period—the drawings for a new venture to be called *The Savoy* —and was soon to begin work on the superb designs for *The Rape of the Lock*, which were to thrust him at a stroke into the foremost achievement of his age. Before four years were run out, Beardsley was to be several months in his grave.

As Beardsley that day stumbled amongst the mounds of the dead, so was his life's journey thenceforth to be—one long struggle to crawl out of the field of the asphodels and away from the open grave that yawned for him by day and by night. He was to feel himself being dragged back to it again and again by unseen hands—was to spend his strength in the frantic struggle to escape—he was to get almost out of sight of the green mounds for a sunny day or two, only to find himself drawn back by the clammy hand of the Reaper to the edge of the open grave again. Death played with the terrified man as a cat plays with a mouse—with cruel forbearance let him clamber out of his grave, out of the meadow of the dead, even out into the sunshine on the high road, only maliciously to pluck him back again in a night. And we, who are astounded by the haunting creations of his imagination that were about to be poured forth throughout two or three years of this agony, ought to realise that Beardsley wrought these blithe and lyrical things between the terrors of a constant fight for life, for the very breath of his body, with the gaunt lord of death. We ought to realise that even as Beardsley, by light of his candles, wrought his art, the skeleton leered like an evil ghoul out of the shadows of his room. For, realising that, one turns with added amazement to the gaiety and charm of *The Rape of the Lock*. Surely the hideous nightmares that now and again issued from his plagued brain are far less a subject for bewilderment than the fantastic and rollicking wit that tripped from his facile pen!

Beardsley knew he was a doomed man even on the threshold of manhood; and he strove with feverish intensity to get a lifetime into each twelvemonth. He knew that for him there would be few to-morrows—he knew that he had little to which to look forward, and had best live his life to-day. And he lived it like one possessed.

AUBREY BEARDSLEY

AUBREY BEARDSLEY

1872 1898

" I have one aim—the grotesque. If I am not grotesque I am nothing."—*Aubrey Beardsley*, Dec. 1896.

" I may claim to have some command of line. I try to get as much as possible out of a single curve or straight line."—*Aubrey Beardsley.*

I

BIRTH AND FAMILY

TO a somewhat shadowy figure of a man, said to be " something in the City," of the name of Beardsley—one Vincent Paul Beardsley—and to his wife, Ellen Agnes, the daughter of an army surgeon of the family of the historic name of Pitt, there was born on the twenty-first day of the August of 1872, in their home at the house of the army surgeon at Buckingham Road in Brighton, their second child, a boy, whom they christened Aubrey Vincent Beardsley, little foreseeing that in a short hectic twenty-five years the lad would lie a-dying, having made the picturesque name of Beardsley world-famous.

Whether the father were a victim to the hideous taint of consumption that was to be the cruel dowry transmitted to the gifted boy, does not appear in the gossip of the time. Indeed, the father flits illusive, stealthy as a phantom in Victorian carpet-slippers, through the chronicles and gossip of the boy's childhood, and as ghostlike fades away, departing unobtrusive, vaporous, into the shades of oblivion, his work of fathering done, leaving behind him little impression unless it be that so slight a footprint as he made upon the sands of time sets us wondering by what freak or perhaps irony of circumstance

he was called to the begetting of the fragile little fellow who was to bear his name and raise it from out the fellowship of the great unknown. For, when all's said, it *was* a significance—if his only significance—to have fathered the wonderful boy who, as he lay dying in his twenties, had imprinted this name of Beardsley on the recording tablets of the genius of his race in the indelible ink of high fulfilment. However, in the reflected radiance of his son, he flits for a brief moment into the limelight and is gone, whether "something in the City" or what does not now matter—his destiny was far otherwise. But at least it was granted to him by Fortune, so niggardly of gifts to him, that, from whatever modest window to which he withdrew himself, he should live to see the full splendour of his strange son, who, as at the touch of a magician's wand, was to make the pen's line into very music—the Clown and Harlequin and Pierrot of his age. . . .

As so often happens in the nursery of genius, it was the bright personality of the mother that watched over, guided, and, with unceasing vigilance and forethought, moulded the child's mind and character—therefore the man's—in so far as the moulding of mind and character be beyond the knees of the gods—a mother whose affection and devotion were passionately returned by the lad and his beautiful sister, also destined to become well known in the artistic world of London as Mabel Beardsley, the actress. From his mother also the boy inherited a taste for art; she herself had painted in water colours as a girl.

II

CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL

The "Puerilia"

IT was a strange little household in Buckingham Road, Brighton, well calculated, for all its modest seeming, to be the nursery of some mischievous sprite. In what to the world appeared an ordinary middle-class home, the small boy and girl were brought up by the gently bred and cultured mother in an intellectual atmosphere that inevitably became a forcing-house to any intelligent child—and both children were uncannily intelligent. The little girl Mabel Beardsley was two or three years older than the boy Aubrey, fortunately for the lad as things turned out. At the same time it was not precisely a healthy atmosphere for any child, least of all for a fragile wayward spirit.

It is difficult to imagine the precocious child poring over the exquisitely healthy and happy nursery rhymes of Randolph Caldecott, which began to appear about the sixth or seventh year of little Aubrey's life—yet in his realm Randolph Caldecott is one of the greatest illustrators that this country has brought forth. You may take it as a sure test of a sense of artistry and taste in parents whether their children are given the art of Randolph Caldecott in the nursery or the somewhat empty artiness of Kate Greenaway. The Beardsleys were given Kate Greenaway; and the small Aubrey thus lost invaluable early lessons in drawing, in "seeing" character in line and form, and in the wholesome joy of country sights and sounds.

A quiet and reserved child, Aubrey was early employing his pencil, and revealed an almost uncanny flair for music.

Sent to a kindergarten, the child did not take kindly to forced lessons, but showed eager delight in anything to do with music or drawing or decoration.

He was but seven years old when, in 1879, his mother's heart was anguished by the first terror of the threat of that fell disease which was to dog his short

career and bring him down. He was sent to a preparatory school at Hurst-pierpoint for a couple of years. Here the child seems to have made his chief impression on his little comrades and teachers by establishing his personal courage and an extreme reserve—which sounds as if the small Aubrey found himself in troubled waters. However, the ugly symptoms of delicacy now showed marked threat of consumption; and a change had to be made.

At nine years of age, in 1881, the boy was taken to Epsom for a couple of years, when his family made a move that was to have a profound influence over his future.

In the March of 1883, in his eleventh year, when the family settled in London, Aubrey, with his sister Mabel, was even at this early age so skilled in music that he had made his appearance in public as an infant prodigy—the two children playing at concerts. Indeed, the boy's knowledge of music was so profound that there was more than whimsy in the phrase so often upon his lips in the after-years when, apologising for speaking with authority on music, he excused himself on the plea that it was the only subject of which he knew anything. His feeling for sound was to create the rhythmic quality of his line when, in the years to come, he was to give forth line that "sings" like the notes of a violin. But whether Aubrey's drawings for menus and invitation-cards in coloured chalks were due to his study of Kate Greenaway or not, the little fellow was certainly fortunate in getting "quite considerable sums" for them; for, of a truth, they must have been fearsome things. As we shall see, Aubrey Beardsley's early work was wretched and unpromising stuff.

A year of the unnatural life the boy was leading in London made it absolutely necessary in the August of 1884, at his twelfth birthday, to send the two children back to Brighton to live with an old aunt, where the boy and girl were now driven back upon themselves by the very loneliness of their living. Aubrey steeped himself in history, eagerly reading Freeman and Green.

In the November he began to attend the Brighton Grammar School; and in the January of 1885 he became a boarder at that school.

Here fortune favoured Aubrey; and he was to know three and a half years at the school—very happy years. His housemaster, Mr. King, greatly liked the precocious youngster, and encouraged him in his tastes by letting

him have the run of a sitting-room and library; so that Aubrey Beardsley was happy as the day was long. His "quaint personality" soon made its mark. In the June of 1885, near his thirteenth birthday, he wrote a little poem, "The Valiant," in the school magazine. The delicate boy, as might be expected, found all athletic sports distasteful and a strain upon his fragile body, and he was generally to be found with a book when the others were at play. His early love for Carlyle's *French Revolution*, for the poets, and for the Tudor and Restoration dramatists was remarkable in one so young. He read *Erewhon* and "enjoyed it immensely," though it had been lent to him with grave doubts as to whether it were not too deep for him. His unflagging industry became a byword. He caricatured the masters; acted in school plays—appearing even before large audiences at the Pavilion—and was the guiding spirit in the weekly performances at the school got up by Mr. King, and for which he designed programmes. His headmaster, Mr. Marshall, showed a kindly attitude towards the lad; but it was Mr. Payne who actively encouraged his artistic leanings, as Mr. King his theatrical.

Unfortunately, in the radiance of his after-rise to fame, these "puerilia" have been eagerly acclaimed by writers on his art as revelations of his budding genius; but as a painful matter of plain unvarnished truth, they were wretched trashy efforts that ought to have been allowed to be blotted from his record. Probably his performances as an actor were as painful a business as the grown-ups are compelled to suffer at school speech-days. Beardsley himself showed truer judgment than his fond admirers in that, on reaching to years of discretion, he ever desired, and sought every means in his power, to obliterate his immature efforts by exchanging good work for them and then destroying them. Indeed, the almost incredible fact about Beardsley's early work is that it was such unutterable trash.

Of the influences that were going to the making of Aubrey's mind at school, it is well to note that the precocious youngster bought each volume of the "Mermaid" issue of the Elizabethan dramatists as it came out, giving amateur performances of the plays with his sister in his holidays. By the time he was to leave Brighton Grammar School at sixteen, he had a very thorough grip on Elizabethan and Restoration literature. It is, some of it, very strong meat even for sixteen; but, as we have seen, Aubrey had been fed on strong meat almost from infancy. Early mastering the French tongue,

the lad was soon steeped in the French novels and classics. From the French he worked back to Latin, of which he is said to have been a facile reader—but such Latin as he had was probably much of a piece with the dog-Latin of a classical education.

Now we know from his school-friend, C. B. Cochran, that Aubrey Beardsley drew the designs for the "Pied Piper" before he left the school in mid-1888—though the play was not performed until Christmastide, at the Dome in Brighton on Wednesday, December the 19th, 1888. Cochran also bears witness to the fact that the pen-and-wash drawing of *Holywell Street* was made in mid-1888, before he left the school. He describes his friend Beardsley, with "his red hair—worn à la Brétonne," which I take it means "bobbed," as girls call it to-day. Beardsley is "indifferent" in school-work, but writes verse and is very musical. Cochran and Beardsley went much to matinées at Brighton; and at one of these was played *L'Enfant Prodigue* without words—it made an ineffaceable impression on Beardsley.

There is no question that *L'Enfant Prodigue* and the rococo of Brighton Pavilion coloured the vision and shaped the genius of Aubrey Beardsley; and he never let them go. He was to flirt with "faked" mediævalism; he was to flirt awhile with Japan; but he ever came back to Pierrot and the bastard rococo of Brighton Pavilion.

Beardsley was now becoming very particular about his dress, though how exactly he fitted the red hair "à la Brétonne" to his theory of severe good taste in dress that should not call attention to the wearer would require more than a little guesswork.

The midsummer of 1888 came to Brighton Grammar School as it came to the rest of the world, and Aubrey Beardsley's schooldays were numbered. At his old school the lank, angular youth had become a marked personality. Several of his schoolfellows were immensely proud of him. But the uprooting was at hand; and the July of 1888, on the eve of his sixteenth birthday, saw him bidding farewell and leaving for London, straightway to become a clerk in an architect's office.

At Brighton Grammar School, Beardsley left behind him all his "puerilia"—or what the writers generally call his "juvenilia," but these were not as yet. It is almost incredible that the same hesitant, inarticulate, childish hand that drew the feeble puerilities of the "Pied Piper" could at

the same time have been making the wash-drawing of *Holywell Street.* It may be that Mr. Cochran's memory plays him a month or two false, and a month or two was a long stage in Beardsley's hectic career—it is difficult to see why he should have made a drawing at a school in Brighton of a street in London that he had not yet learnt to frequent—but even granting that the *Holywell Street* was rough-sketched in London and sent by Beardsley to his schoolfellow a month or two later, in the *Holywell Street* (1888) there is a significance. So far, of promise there has been not a tittle—one searches the " puerilia " for the slightest glimmer of a sign—but there is none.

In the *Holywell Street* there *is* the sign—and a portent.

It is Beardsley's first milestone on his strange, fantastic, tragi-comic wayfaring.

III

YOUTH IN LONDON AS A CITY CLERK

Mid-1888 to Mid-1891—Sixteen to Nineteen

The "Juvenilia" and the "Scrap-book"

AT sixteen, in the August of 1888, Aubrey Beardsley, tall, loose-limbed, angular, and greatly stooping, went to live with his father and mother in London in their home at 59 Charlwood Street, Pimlico, in order to go into business in the City as clerk in the office of an architect in Clerkenwell, awaiting a vacancy in an Insurance office.

The youth came up to London—though intensely self-conscious and shy and sensitive to social rebuff—bright, quick-witted, intelligent, lionised by his school, to find himself a somewhat solitary figure in the chilling indifference of this great City. But in his first little Pimlico home in London, he had the affectionate and keenly appreciative, sympathetic, and hero-worshipping companionship of his devoted mother and sister. In this home with his mother and sister Aubrey at once found himself in an atmosphere that made the world outside quite unimportant—an atmosphere to which he returned eagerly at the end of his day's drudgery in the City; and with the loud bang of the hall-door, he shut out that City for the rest of the evening. Brother and sister were happy in their own life.

But it is the *Holywell Street* drawing which gives the clue. It is almost as vital as this home in Pimlico. In those days the dingy old ramshackle street better known as Bookseller's Row—that made an untidy backwater to the Strand between the churches of St. Mary le Strand and St. Clement Danes, now swept and garnished as Aldwych—was the haunt of all who loved old books. You trod on the toes of Prime Ministers or literary gods or intellectual riff-raff with equal absence of mind. But Holywell Street, with all its vicissitudes, its jumble of naughtinesses and unsavoury prosecutions—and its devotion to books—was nearing its theatric end. In many ways Holywell

Street was at this time a symbol of Beardsley. The young City clerk spent every moment he could snatch from his office in such fascinating haunts as the second-hand bookshops.

We know that, on coming to London, he wrote a farce, *A Brown Study*, which was played at the Royal Pavilion at Brighton; and that before he was seventeen he had written the first act of a three-act comedy and a monologue called *A Race for Wealth*.

A free afternoon would take him to the British Museum or the National Gallery to browse amongst antique art.

His time for creative work could have been but scant, and his delicate health probably compelled a certain amount of caution on his behalf from his anxious sister and mother. But at nine every evening he really began to live; and he formed the habit of working at night by consequence. We may take it that Beardsley's first year in London was filled with eager pursuit of literature and art rather than with any deliberate or sustained creative effort. And he would make endless sacrifices to hear good music, which all cut into his scant time. Nor had he yet even dreamed of pursuing an artistic career.

The family were fortunate in the friendship of the Reverend Alfred Gurney, who had known them at Brighton, and had greatly encouraged Aubrey's artistic leanings.

Beardsley had been only a year in London when he retired from the architect's office and became a clerk in the Guardian Insurance Office, about his seventeenth birthday—August 1889. Whether this change bettered his prospects or whatsoever was the motive, it was unfortunately to be the beginning of two years of appalling misery and suffering, in body and soul, for the youth. His eighteenth and nineteenth years were the black years of Aubrey Beardsley—and as blank of achievement as they were black.

From mid-1889 to mid-1891, then, we have this two years' emptiness in Beardsley's career. Scarcely had he taken his seat at his desk in the Guardian Insurance Office when, in the autumn of 1889, he was assailed by a violent attack of bleeding from the lungs. The theatres and operas and artistic life had to be wholly abandoned; and what strength remained to him he had to concentrate on keeping his clerkly position at the Insurance Office in the City.

The deadly hæmorrhages which pointed to his doom came near to breaking down his wonderful spirit. The gloom that fell upon his racked body compelled him to cease from drawing, and robbed him of the solace of the opera. It was without relief. The detestation of a business life which galled his free-roving spirit, but had to be endured that he might help to keep the home for his family, came near to sinking him in the deeps of despair at a moment when his bodily strength and energy were broken by the appalling exhaustion of the pitiless disease which mercilessly stalked at his side by day and by night. He forsook all hope of an artistic life in drawing or literature. How the plagued youth endured is perhaps best now not dwelt upon—it was enough to have broken the courage of the strongest man.

Beardsley's first three years in London, then, were empty, unfruitful years. From sixteen to nineteen he was but playing with art as a mere recreation from his labours in the City, as most of his fellow clerks played games or chased hobbies. What interest he may have had in art was exercised at best only in an amateurish fashion.

His first year had seen him reading much amongst his favourite eighteenth-century French writers, and such modern books as appealed to his morbid inquisition into sex. The contemplation of his disease led the young fellow, verging on manhood, to medical books; and it was now that the diagrams led him to that repulsive interest in the unborn embryo—especially the human fœtus—with which he repeatedly and wilfully disfigured his art on occasion. He harped and harped upon it like a dirty-minded schoolboy.

Soon after he had become a clerk in the Guardian Insurance Office he began to frequent Jones and Evans's well-known bookshop in Queen Street, Cheapside, whither he drifted at the luncheon hour, to pore over its treasures —to Beardsley the supreme treasure.

It was Beardsley's lucky star that drew him into that Cheapside bookshop, where, at first shyly, he began to be an occasional visitor, but in a twelvemonth an almost daily frequenter.

This famous bookshop near the Guildhall, which every City man of literary and artistic taste knows so well—indeed the bookshop of Jones and Evans has been waggishly called the University of the City clerk, and the jest masks a truth—was but a minute's walk for Beardsley; and the youth was fortunate

in early winning the notice of one of the firm who presided over the place. Frederick Evans was a man of wide reading, delighted in music, and was a very skilled and artistic photographer. The two men had much in common, and not least was their passionate love of music. It was to Frederick Evans and his hobby of photography that later we were to owe two of the finest and most remarkable portraits of Beardsley at the height of his achievement and his vogue.

Thus it came about that Beardsley made his first literary friendship in the great City. He would take the few drawings he made at this time and discuss them with Frederick Evans. Soon they were on so friendly a footing that Evans would " swop " the books for which the youth craved in exchange for drawings. Evans's kindly encouragement of Beardsley did more for his development at this time than it is well possible to calculate. At the Guardian Insurance Office there sat next to Beardsley a young clerk called Pargeter, with whom Beardsley made many visits to picture galleries and the British Museum, and both haunted the bookshop in Cheapside.

We know by the *Scrap-book*, signed by him on the 6th of May, 1890, what in Beardsley's own estimate was his best work up to that time, and the sort of literature and art that interested him. None of this work has much promise; whilst it shows little increasing command of the pictorial idea, it does reveal an increasing sense of selection—that is all. His " juvenilia " are as mediocre as his " puerilia " were wretched; yet there begins to appear a certain personal vision. But it is all the sort of stuff that every dabbler with pen and ink perpetrates in amateur fashion in the effort to achieve pictorial ideas.

From the very beginning Beardsley lived in books—saw life only through books—was aloof from his own age and his own world, which he did not understand nor care to understand; nay, thought it rather vulgar to understand. When he shook off the dust of the City from his daily toil, he lived intellectually and emotionally in a bookish atmosphere with Madame Bovary, Beatrice Cenci, Manon Lescaut, Mademoiselle de Maupin, Phèdre, Daudet's Sappho and La Dame aux Camélias as his intimates. He sketched them as yet with but an amateur scribbling. But he dressed for the part of a dandy in his narrow home circle, affecting all the airs of superiority of the day—contempt for the middle-class, contempt of Mrs. Grundy; elaborately culti-

vating a flippant wit, a caustic tongue. He had the taint of what Tree used to whip with contempt as " refainement "—he affected a voice and employed picturesque words in conversation. He pined for the day when he might mix with the great ones as he conceived the great ones to be; and he sought to acquire their atmosphere as he conceived it. Beardsley was always theatrical. He noticed that people of quality, though they dressed well, avoided ostentation or eccentricity—dressed " just so." He set himself that ideal. He tried to catch their manner. The result was that he gave the impression of intense artificiality. In 1890 had appeared Whistler's *Gentle Art of Making Enemies* —Beardsley steeped himself in its venomous wit and set himself to form a style upon it, much as did other young bloods with artistic ambitions.

As suddenly as the blackness of his two blank years of obliteration had fallen upon him a year after he came to town, so as he reached mid-1891, his nineteenth birthday, the hideous threat lifted from him, and his courage returned with health—and his belief in himself. So far he had treated art as an amateur seeking recreation; he now decided to make an effort to become an artist. The sun shone for him. He determined to get a good opinion on his prospects. He secured an introduction to Burne-Jones.

IV

FORMATIVE PERIOD OF DISCIPLESHIP

Mid-1891 to Mid-1892—Nineteen to Twenty

The "Burne-Jonesesques"

ON a Sunday, the 12th of July, 1891, on the eve of his nineteenth birthday, Beardsley called on Burne-Jones.

He was still a clerk in the City—his weekdays given to drudgery at the insurance office. He had to seize occasion by the forelock—therefore Sunday.

The gaunt young dandy went to Burne-Jones with the light of a new life in his eyes; he had shaken off the bitter melancholy which had blackened his past two years and had kept his eyes incessantly on the grave; and he entered the gates of Burne-Jones's house in the long North End Road in West Kensington with new hopes built upon the promise of renewed health.

We can guess roughly what was in the portfolio that he took to show Burne-Jones—we have seen what he had gathered together in the *Scrap-book* as his best work up to mid-1890, and he had done little to add to it by mid-1891. We know the poverty of his artistic skill from the wretched pen-and-ink portrait he made of himself at this time—a thing so wretched that he strained every resource to recover it from Robert Ross, who maliciously hid it from him and eventually gave it to the British Museum after Beardsley's death—an act which was enough to have made Beardsley turn in his grave. But that was not as yet. We know, however, from a fellow clerk in the City that Beardsley had made an occasional drawing in wash, or toned in pencil, like the remarkably promising *Molière*, which it is difficult to believe as having been made previous to the visit to Burne-Jones, were it not that it holds no hint of Burne-Jones's influence, which was now to dominate Beardsley's style awhile.

Burne-Jones took a great liking to the youth; was charmed with his

quick intelligence and enthusiasm; tickled by his ironies; and took him to his heart. When Beardsley left the hospitable man he left in high spirits—an ardent disciple. Burne-Jonesesques were henceforth to pour forth from his hand for fully a couple of years.

Beardsley's call on Watts was not so happy—the solemnities reigned, and the great man shrewdly suspected that Beardsley was not concerned with serious fresco—'tis even whispered that he suspected naughtiness.

As Aubrey Beardsley had seen the gates of Burne-Jones's house opening to him he had hoped that he was stepping into the great world of which he had dreamed in the City. The effect of this visit to Burne-Jones was remarkable. Beardsley plunged into the æsthetic conventions of the mediæval academism of Burne-Jones to which his whole previous taste and his innate gifts were utterly alien. At once he became intrigued over pattern and decoration, for which he had so far shown not a shred of feeling. For the Reverend Alfred Gurney, the old Brighton friend of the family, Beardsley designed Christmas cards which are thin if whole-hearted mimicry of Burne-Jones, as indeed was most of the work on which he launched with enthusiasm, now that he had Burne-Jones's confidence in his artistic promise whereon to found his hopes. Not only was he turned aside from his eighteenth-century loves to an interest in the Arthurian legends which had become the keynote of the Æsthetic Movement under Morris and Burne-Jones, but his drawings in the kindred atmosphere of the great Teutonic sagas, Tristan and Tannhäuser and the Götterdämmerung, reveal that he was also now in a seventh heaven and back at his beloved operas and music again. Frederick Evans, who was as much a music enthusiast as literary and artistic in taste, saw much of the young City clerk in his shop in Cheapside this year. Beardsley was striving hard to master the craftsmanship of artistic utterance with the pen line.

Another popular tune that caught Beardsley's ears at this time was the Japanese vogue set agog by Whistler out of France. Japan conquered London as she had conquered France—if rather a pallid ghost of Japan. The London house became an abomination of desolation, of Japanese cheap art and imitation Japanese furniture. There is nothing more alien to an English room than Eastern decorations, no matter how beautiful in themselves. But the vogue-mongers sent out the word that Japan was lord of the house—and it was so.

It happened that the Japanese craze that was on the town intrigued

Beardsley sufficiently to make him take considerable note of the use of pure line by the Japs—he saw prints in shops and they interested him, but he had scant knowledge of Japanese art; the balance, spacing, and use of line were a revelation to him, and he tried to make a sort of bastard art of replacing the Japanese atmosphere and types with English types and atmosphere. There was in the convention of Japan a delightful disregard of perspective and of atmospheric values in relating figures to scenery which appealed to Beardsley's then limited hand's skill, and he was soon experimenting in the grotesque effects which the Japanese convention allowed to him.

Said to be of this year of 1891 is an illustrated "Letter to G. F. Scotson-Clark, Esq.," his musician friend, "written after visiting Whistler's Peacock Room." This much-vaunted room probably owes most of its notoriety to the fiercely witty quarrel that Whistler waged with his wealthy patron Leyland, the ship-owner. It is not clear that the form and furniture of this pseudo-Japanese room owed anything whatsoever to Whistler; indeed, it is only common justice to Whistler's genius to believe that he had nothing to do with it. It would seem that his part in its decoration was confined to smothering an already existing hideosity in blue paint and gold leaf. It was a room in which slender spindles or narrow, square, upright shafts of wood, fixed a few inches from the walls, left the chief impression of the Japanesque, suggestive of the exquisite little cages the Japs make for grasshoppers and fire-flies; and to this extent Whistler may have approved the abomination, for we have his disciple Menpes's word for it that Whistler's law for furniture was that it "should be as simple as possible and be of straight lines." Whistler and Wilde's war against the bric-à-brac huddle and hideousness of the crowded mid-Victorian drawing-room brought in a barren, bare type of habitation to usurp it which touched bottom in a designed emptiness, in preciousness, in dreariness, and in discomfort. Whatsoever Whistler's blue and gold-leaf scheme, carried out all over this pretentious room, may have done to better its state, at least it must have rid it of the brown melancholy of the stamped Spanish leather which Whistler found so "stunning to paint upon." It is probable that this contraption of pseudo-Japanese art, to which the rare genius of Whistler was degraded, did impress the youthful Beardsley in this his imitative stage of development, owing to its wide publicity. The fussy, futile, slender, straight wooden uprights of the furnishments of which the

whole thing largely consisted, were to be adopted by Beardsley as the basis of his drawings of furniture a year or two afterwards, as we shall see. But in some atonement, the superb peacock shutters by Whistler also left their influence on the sensitive brain of the younger man—those peacocks that were to bring forth a marked advance in Beardsley's decorative handling a couple of years later, when he was to give his *Salome* to the world.

One of the many fatuous claims made by his eulogists is that Beardsley owed nothing in his art to anybody. He was, as a matter of fact, very derivative. Almost as he lay a-dying he frankly and without conceit confessed to filching from his beloved Claude Lorrain's ships and seashores—and his debt to Burne-Jones, Walter Crane, Anning Bell, and others was as obvious as his debt to the eighteenth-century engravers of France.

It is not uninteresting to note that out of this letter flits for a fleeting moment the shadowy figure of the father—as quickly to vanish again. At least the father is still alive; for Beardsley calls for his friend's companionship, as his mother and sister are at Woking and he and his "pater" alone in the house.

Beardsley's old Brighton Senior House-Master, Mr. King, had become secretary to the Blackburn Technical Institute, for which he edited a little magazine called *The Bee;* and it was in the November of 1891 that Beardsley drew for it as frontispiece his *Hamlet*, in which he at once reveals his Burne-Jonesesque discipleship.

The winter of 1891 closed down on Aubrey Beardsley in a middle-class home in Pimlico, knowing no one of note or consequence except Burne-Jones. His hand's skill was halting and his craftsmanship hesitant, even if taking root in a feeling for line and design; but the advance is so marked that he was clearly working hard at self-development. It was as the year ran out, some six months after the summer that had brought hope and life to Beardsley out of the grave, that, at the Christmastide of 1891, Aymer Vallance, one of the best-known members of the Morris group, went to call on the lonely youngster, after disregarding for a year and a half the urgings of the Reverend C. G. Thornton, a parson who had known the boy when at Brighton School. Vallance found Beardsley one afternoon at Charlwood Street, his first Pimlico home, and came away wildly enthusiastic over the drawings that Beardsley showed him at his demand. It is to Vallance's credit and judgment that he

there and then turned the lad's ambition towards becoming an artist by profession—an idea that up to this time Beardsley had not thought possible or practicable.

Now whilst loving this man for it, one rather blinks at Vallance's enthusiasm. On what drawings did his eyes rest, and wherein was he overwhelmed by the revelation? Burne-Jones has a little puzzled us in the summer; and now Vallance! Well, there were the futile "puerilia"—the *Pied Piper* stuff—which one cannot believe that Beardsley would show. There was the Burne-Jonesesque *Hamlet* from the *Bee*, just published. Perhaps one or two other Burne-Jonesesques. He himself can recall nothing better. In fact Beardsley had not done anything better than the *Hamlet*. Then there was the *Scrap-book!* Was the *Molière* by any chance in the *Scrap-book?* However, it was fortunate for the young Beardsley that he won so powerful a friend and such a scrupulous, honourable, and loyal friend, as Aymer Vallance.

On St. Valentine's Day, the 14th of February, 1892, before the winter was out, Vallance had brought about a meeting between Robert Ross and Aubrey Beardsley at a gathering at Vallance's rooms. Robert Ross wrote his impression of that first meeting—after Beardsley was dead—and in any case his record of it needs careful acceptance; but Ross too was overwhelmed by the personality of the quaint youth—Ross was always more interested in personality than in artistic achievement, fortunately, for his was not a very competent opinion on art, for which he had the antique-dealer's *flair* rather than any deep appreciation. But he was a powerful friend to make for Beardsley. Ross had the entrance to the doors of fashion and power; he had a racy wit and was at heart a kindly man enough; and he not only came to have considerable authority on matters of art and literature in the drawing-rooms of the great, but with editors. And he was doing much dealing in pictures. Ross, with his eternal quest of the fantastic and the unexpected, was fascinated by the strange originality and weird appearance of the shy youth, whom he describes as with "rather long hair, which, instead of being *ebouriffé*, as the ordinary genius is expected to wear it, was brushed smoothly and flatly on his head and over part of his immensely high and narrow brow." Beardsley's hair never gave me the impression of being brown; Max Beerbohm once described it better as "tortoiseshell"—it was an extraordinary colour, as artificial as his voice and manner. The "terribly drawn and emaciated

face" was always cadaverous. Beardsley seems gradually to have thawed at this forgathering at Vallance's, losing his shyness in congenial company, and was soon found to have a rare and intimate knowledge of the British Museum and National Gallery. He talked more of literature and of music than of art. Ross was so affected by the originality of the young fellow's conversation that he even attributed to Beardsley the oft-quoted jape of the old French wit that "it only takes one man to make an artist but forty to make an Academician."

It is interesting to try and discover what drew the fulsome praise of Beardsley's genius from Ross at this first meeting—what precisely did Ross see in the inevitable portfolio which Beardsley carried under his arm as he entered the room? As regards whatever drawings were in the portfolio, Beardsley had evidently lately drawn the *Procession of Joan of Arc* in pencil which afterwards passed to Frederick Evans, a work which Beardsley at this time considered the only thing with any merit from his own hands, and from which he could not be induced to part for all Ross's bribes, though he undertook to make a pen-and-ink replica from it for Ross, which he delivered to him in the May of 1892. Beardsley had a truer and more just estimate of his own work than had his admirers.

At this stage, in mid-1892, on the eve of his twentieth year, Beardsley was so utterly mediocre in all artistic promise, to say nothing of achievement, that this commonplace *Procession of Joan of Arc* could stand out at the forefront of his career, and was, as we shall soon see, to be widely exploited in order to get him public recognition—in which it distinctly and deservedly failed. He himself was later to go hot and cold about the very mention of it, and to be ashamed of it. It was not as wretched as all that.

We have Ross's word for it at this time that "except in his manner," his general appearance altered little to the end. Indeed, if Beardsley could only have trodden underfoot the painful conceit which his rapidly increasing artistic circle fanned by their praise and liking for him, he might have escaped the eventual applause and comradeship of that shallow company to whom he proceeded and amongst whom he loved to glitter—yet, in moments of depression, scorned. But it is canting and stupid and unjust to make out that Beardsley was dragged down. Nothing of the kind. The young fellow's whole soul and taste drew about him, he was not compelled into, the company

of the erotic and the precious in craftsmanship. And Robert Ross had no small share in opening wide the doors to him.

But it is well and only just to recognise without cant that, by a curious paradox, if Beardsley had been content to live in the mediæval atmosphere of the Æsthetic Movement into which his destiny now drifted him, for all its seriousness, its solemnity, and its fervour, his art would have sunk to but recondite achievement at best. It was the wider range of the eighteenth-century writers, especially the French writers—it was their challenge to the past—it was their very inquisition into, and their very play with, morals and eroticism, that brought the art of Beardsley to life where he might otherwise have remained, as he now was, solely concerned with craftsmanship. He was to run riot in eroticism—he was to treat sex with a marked frankness that showed it to be his god—but it is only right to say that the artist's realm is the whole range of the human emotions; and he has as much right to utter the moods of sex as has the ordinary novelist of the "best seller" who relies on the discreet rousing of sexual moods in a more guarded and secret way, but who does rely on this mood nevertheless and above all for the creation of so-called "works that any girl may read." The whole business is simply a matter of degree. There is far too much cant about it all. Sex is vital to the race. It is when sex is debauched that vice ensues; and it is in the measure in which Beardsley was to debauch sex in his designs or not that he is alone subject to blame or praise in the matter.

Whilst Beardsley in voice and manner developed a repulsive conceit—it was a pose of such as wished to rise above suspicion of being of the middle class to show contempt for the middle class—he was one of the most modest of men about his art. A delightful and engaging smile he had for everyone. He liked to be liked. It was only in the loneliness of his own conceit that he posed to himself as a sort of bitter Whistler hating his fellow-man. It increased his friendliness and opened the gates to his intimate side if he felt that anyone appreciated his work; but he never expected people to be in the least artistic, and thought none the less of them for it. He would listen to and discuss criticism of his work with an aloof and open mind; without rancour or patronage or resentment; and what was more, he would often act on it, as we shall see. Beardsley was a very likeable fellow to meet. When he was not posing as the enemy of the middle classes he was a charming and witty companion.

Meantime, in the late spring or early summer of 1892, Beardsley, after a holiday, probably at Brighton, called on Burne-Jones again, and is said by some then to have made his attempt on Watts, so icily repelled. However, to Burne-Jones he went, urged to it largely by the ambition growing within him and fostered strenuously by Vallance and his friends, to dare all and make for art.

Burne-Jones received him with characteristic generosity. And remember that Beardsley was now simply a blatant and unashamed mimic of Burne-Jones, and a pretty mediocre artist at that. We are about to witness a very different reception of the youth by a very different temperament. Burne-Jones, cordial and enthusiastic and sympathetic, gave the young hopeful the soundest advice he ever had, saying that Beardsley "had learnt too much from the old masters and would benefit by the training of an art school." From this interview young Beardsley came back in high fettle. He drew a caricature of himself being kicked down the steps of the National Gallery by the old masters.

This summer of 1892 saw Beardsley in Paris, probably on a holiday; and as probably with an introduction from Burne-Jones to Puvis de Chavannes, who received the young fellow well, and greatly encouraged him, introducing him to one of his brother painters as "un jeune artiste anglais qui fait des choses étonnantes."

Beardsley, with the astute earnestness with which he weighed all intelligent criticism, promptly followed the advice of Burne-Jones and Puvis de Chavannes, and put himself down to attend Professor Brown's night-school at Westminster, whilst during the day he went on with his clerking at the Guardian Insurance Office. This schooling was to be of the scantiest, but it probably had one curious effect on his art—Japanese art was on the town, so was Whistler; the studios talked Japanese prints, as to-day they talk Cubism and Blast. And it is significant that the drawing which Beardsley made of Professor Brown, perhaps the best work of his hands up to this time, is strongly influenced by the scratchy, nervous line of Whistler's etching and is spaced in the Japanese convention. The irony of this Whistlerianism is lost upon us if we forget the bitter antagonism of Whistler and Burne-Jones at this very time—Whistler had published his *Gentle Art of Making Enemies* in 1890, and London had not recovered from its enjoyment of the spites of the great ones. Beardsley him-

self used to say that he had not been to Brown's more than half a dozen times, but his eager eyes were quick to see.

However, renewed health, an enlarging circle of artistic friends, an occasional peep into the home of genius, hours snatched from the City and spent in bookshops, the British Museum, the National Gallery, the Opera and the concert room, revived ambition.

And Vallance, cheered by Burne-Jones's reception of the youth, now sought to clinch things by bringing Beardsley at his most impressionable age into the charmed circle of William Morris. The generous soul of Vallance little understood Morris—or Beardsley; but his impulse was on all fours with his lifelong devotion to the gifted youngster's cause.

Before we eavesdrop at the William Morris meeting, let us rid ourselves of a few illusions that have gathered about Beardsley. First of all, Beardsley was on the edge of his twentieth birthday and had not made a drawing or shown a sign of anything but mediocre achievement. Next—and perhaps this is the most surprising as it is an interesting fact—Beardsley had scarcely, if indeed at all, seen a specimen of the Kelmscott books, their style, their decoration, or their content! Now Vallance, wrapped up in mediævalism, and Frederick Evans, handling rich and rare hobbies in bookbinding, probably never realised that to Beardsley it might be a closed book, and worse—undoubtedly not very exhilarating if opened, except for the rich blackness of some of the conventionally decorated pages. It is very important to remember this. And we must be just to Morris. Before we step further a-tiptoe to Morris's house, remember another fact; Beardsley was not a thinker, not an intellectual man. He was a born artist to his long, slender finger-tips; he sucked all the honey from art, whether fiction or drawing or decoration of any kind, with a feverish eagerness that made the world think that because he was wholly bookish, he was therefore intellectual. He was a pure artist in that he was concerned wholly with the emotions, with his feelings, with the impressions that life or books made upon his senses. But Beardsley knew and cared nothing for world-affairs, knew and cared as much about deep social injustices or struggles as a housemaid. They did not concern him, and he had but a yawn for such things. Social questions bored him like a schoolgirl. Indeed by "social" he would only have understood the society of the great—his idea of it was an extravagantly dressed society of polished people with elaborate

manners, who despised the middle-class virtues as being rather vulgar, who lived in a romantic whirl of exquisite flippancies not without picturesque adulteries, doing each one as the mood took him—only doing it with an air, and dressing well for the part.

Unfortunately, we have not been given Beardsley's correspondence of these days, and the German edition of his letters has not been done into English; but read Beardsley's letters during the last terrible years of his short life to his friend the poet Gray, who became a priest, and you will be amazed by the absence of any intellectual or social interest of any kind whatsoever in the great questions that were racking the age. They might be the letters of a humdrum schoolboy—they even lack manhood—they do not suggest quite a fully developed intelligence.

However, Morris had frequently of late expressed to Vallance his troubled state in getting "suitable illustrations" for his Kelmscott books—he was particularly plagued about the reprint he was then anxious to produce—*Sidonia the Sorceress*. Vallance leaped at the chance of getting an opening for Beardsley; and at once persuaded Beardsley to make a drawing, and add it to his portfolio. All being ready, on a fine Sunday afternoon in the early summer of 1892, his portfolio under his arm, Beardsley and Vallance made their way to Hammersmith and entered the gates of the great man. Morris received the youth courteously. But he was about to be asked to swallow a ridiculous pill.

We have seen that up to this time the portfolio was empty of all but mediocrity—a Burne-Jonesesque or so at best. To put the froth on the black trouble, Vallance had evidently never thought of the utter unfitness of Beardsley's scratchy, pen-drawn Japanese grotesques for the Kelmscott Press; whilst Beardsley probably did not know what the Kelmscott Press meant. He was soon to know—and to achieve. Can one imagine a more fantastic act than taking this drawing to show to Morris? Imagine how a trivial, cheap, very tentative weak line, in grotesque swirls and wriggles, of Sidonia the Sorceress with the black cat, appealed to Morris, who was as serious about the "fat blacks" of his Kelmscott decorations as about his first-born! Remember that up to this time Beardsley had not attempted his strong black line with flat black masses. Morris would have been a fool to commission this untried artist for the work, judging him by his then achievement. Let us go much

further. Beardsley himself would not have been sure of fulfilling it—far less any of his sponsors. And yet !—

Could Morris but have drawn aside the curtain of the future a few narrow folds ! Within a few days of that somewhat disheartening meeting of these two men, the despised Beardsley was to be launching on a rival publication to the Kelmscott Press—he was to smash the " fake " to pieces and make a masterpiece of what the Kelmscott enthusiasm had never been able to lift above monotonous mechanism ! The lad only had to brood awhile over a Kelmscott to beat it at every point—and Frederick Evans was about to give him the chance. He was to beat it to a dull futility. Anything further removed from Beardsley's vision and essence than mediævalism it would be hard to find ; but when the problem was set him, he faced it ; and it is a miracle that he made of it what he did. However, not a soul who had thus far seen his work, not one who was at Morris's house that Sunday afternoon, could foresee it. Morris least of all. Morris was too self-centred to foresee what this lank young clerk from an insurance office meant to himself and all for which he stood in book-illustration. Vallance, for all his personal affection and loyalty to Morris, was disappointed in that Morris failed to be aroused to any interest whatsoever in the drawings in Beardsley's portfolio. Morris went solemnly through that portfolio, thought little of the work, considered the features of the figures neither beautiful nor attractive, but probably trying to find *something* to praise, at last said, " I see you have a feeling for draperies, and," he added, fatuously, " I should advise you to cultivate it "—and so saying he dismissed the whole subject. Beardsley was bitterly disappointed ; but it is only fair to him to say that he was wounded by being repulsed and " not liked," rather than that he was wounded about his drawings. It was a delightful trait in the man, his life long, that he was far more anxious for people to be friendly with him than to care for his drawings—he had no personal feeling whatsoever against anyone for disliking his work. The youth left the premises of William Morris with a fixed determination never to go there again—and he could never be induced to go.

Within a few months of Beardsley's shutting the gates of Kelmscott House on himself for the first and the last time, we shall see Vallance lead another forlorn hope to Morris on Beardsley's behalf ; but the embittered youth refused to go ; Vallance had to go alone. But even as Morris shut his

gates on Beardsley's endeavour, there was to come another who was to fling open to the affronted artist the gates to a far wider realm; one who was to enable him to pluck the beard of William Morris in the doing—one John Dent, a publisher.

This Formative Year of sheer Burne-Jonesesque mimicry was to end in a moment of intense emotion for the young insurance clerk. He was about to leave the City behind him for ever—desert the night-school at Westminster—burn his boats behind him—and launch on his destiny as an artist.

V

BEARDSLEY BECOMES AN ARTIST

Mid-1892 to Mid-1893—Twenty to Twenty-one

Mediævalism and the Hairy-Line Japanesques.
"Le Morte d'Arthur" and the "Bon Mots."

JOHN M. DENT, then a young publisher, was fired with the ambition to put forth the great literary classics for the ordinary man in a way that should be within the reach of his purse, yet rival the vastly costly book-making of William Morris and his allies of the Kelmscott Press. Dent fixed upon Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* to lead the way in his venture; and he confided his scheme to his friend Frederick Evans of the Jones and Evans bookshop in Queen Street, Cheapside. He planned to publish the handsome book in parts—three hundred copies on Dutch handmade paper and fifteen hundred ordinary copies; but he was troubled and at his wit's end as to a fitting decorator and illustrator. He must have a fresh and original artist.

Frederick Evans and John Dent were talking over this perplexity in the Cheapside bookshop when Evans suddenly remarked that he believed that he had found him the very man; and he was showing to Dent Beardsley's drawing *Hail, Mary*, when, looking up, he whispered: "And here he comes!" as there entered a spick-and-span shadow of a young man like one risen from the well-dressed dead. Aubrey Beardsley had happened in, according to his daily wont, strolling over at the luncheon hour from the Guardian Insurance Office hard by for his midday rummage amongst the books. It was like a gift from the gods! Frederick Evans nudged the other's arm, pointed towards the strange youth, and repeated: "There's your man!"

To Beardsley's surprise, Evans beckoned him towards his desk, where he was in earnest colloquy with the man whom Beardsley was now to discover to be the well-known publisher.

So Beardsley and J. M. Dent met.

Introducing the youthful dandy to Dent as the ideal illustrator for his *Morte d'Arthur*, Evans somewhat bewildered Beardsley ; the sudden splendour of the opportunity to prove his gifts rather took him aback. Dent, however, told him reassuringly that the recommendation of Frederick Evans was in itself enough, but if Beardsley would make him a drawing and prove his particular gifts for this particular book, he would at once commission him to illustrate the work.

Beardsley, frantically delighted and excited, undertook to draw a specimen design for Dent's decision ; yet he had his hesitant modesties. Remember that up to this time he had drawn practically nothing of any consequence—he was utterly unknown—and his superb masterwork that was to be, so different from and so little akin in any way to mediævalism, was hidden even from his own vision. The few drawings he had made were in mimicry of Burne-Jones and promised well enough for a mediæval missal in a pretty-pretty sort of way. He was becoming a trifle old for studentship—he was twenty before he made a drawing that was not mediocre. He had never seen one of the elaborate Morris books, and Frederick Evans had to show him a Kelmscott in order to give him some idea of what was in Dent's mind—of what was expected of him.

At last he made to depart ; and, shaking hands with Frederick Evans at the shop-door, he hesitated and, speaking low, said : " It's too good a chance. I'm sure I shan't be equal to it. I am not worthy of it." Evans assured him that he only had to set himself to it and all would be well.

Within a few days Beardsley put forth all his powers to create the finest thing he could, making an eager study of the Kelmscott tradition and knowing that Burne-Jones was held in high esteem in the circle. He took the drawing to Dent—the elaborate and now famous Burne-Jonesesque design that we know as *The Achieving of the San Grael*, which must have been as much a revelation of his powers to the youth himself as it was to Dent. The drawing was destined to appear in gravure as the frontispiece to the second volume of the *Morte d'Arthur*.

Now it is most important to note that this, Beardsley's first serious original work, shows him in mid-1892, at twenty, to have made a bold effort to create an original style by combining his Burne-Jonesesque mediævalism with his

Japanesques of the Hairy Line; and the design is signed with his early "Japanesque mark" which he called his "trademark." It is his first use of the "Japanesque mark." Any designs signed with his name before this time were signed with the initials A. V. B. The early "Japanesque mark" is always stunted and rude. Beardsley's candlesticks were a sort of mascot to him; and I feel sure that the Japanese mark was meant for three candles and three flames—a baser explanation was given by some, but it was only the evil thought of those who tried to see evil in all that Beardsley wrought. We shall have reason to dwell more fully on this "Japanesque mark" and the candles later on.

Dent at once commissioned the youth to illustrate and decorate the *Morte d'Arthur*, which was to begin to appear in print a year thereafter, in the June of 1893—the second volume in 1894.

So Aubrey Beardsley entered upon his first great undertaking—to mimic the mediæval woodcut, or what the Morris school took to be the mediæval woodcut, and—to better his instruction. Frederick Evans set the diadem of his realm upon the youth's brow in a bookshop in Cheapside; and John Dent threw open the gates to that fantastic realm so that he might enter in. Launched upon an artistic career, Beardsley was now to have the good fortune to meet a literary man who was to vaunt him before the world and reveal him to the public—C. Lewis Hind.

Boldly launching on an artistic career, encouraged by this elaborate and important work for Dent, Beardsley, at his sister's strong urging and solicitation, about his twentieth birthday resigned his clerkship in the Guardian Insurance Office and for good and all turned his back on the City. At the same time, feeling that the British Museum and the National Gallery gave him more teaching than he was getting at the studio, he withdrew from Brown's school at Westminster. Being now in close touch with Dent, and having his day free, Beardsley was asked to make some grotesques for the three little volumes of *Bon Mots* by famous wits which Dent was about to publish. So it came about that Beardsley poured out his Japanesque grotesques and *Morte d'Arthur* mediævalism side by side! and was not too careful as to which was the grotesque and which the mediævalism. For the *Bon Mots* he made no pretence of illustration—the florid scribbling lines drew fantastic designs utterly unrelated

to the text or atmosphere of the wits, and were about as thoroughly bad as illustrations in the vital quality of an illustration as could well be. In artistic achievement they were trivialities, some of them better than others, but mostly revealing Beardsley's defects and occasionally dragging him back perilously near to the " puerilia " of his boyhood. But the severe conditions and limitations of the *Morte d'Arthur* page held Beardsley to good velvety blacks and strong line and masses, and were the finest education in art that he ever went through—for he taught himself craftsmanship as he went, in the *Morte d'Arthur*. It was to be the making of him.

One has only to look at the general mediocrity of the grotesques for the *Bon Mots* to realise what a firm self-discipline the solid black decorations of the mediæval *Morte d'Arthur* put upon him for the utterance of his genius. Beardsley knew full well that his whole career depended on those designs for the *Morte d'Arthur*, and he strove to reach his fullest powers in creating them.

Anning Bell was at this time pouring out his bookplates and kindred designs, and in many of Beardsley's designs one could almost tell which of Anning Bell's drawings he had been looking at last. To Walter Crane he owed less, but not a little. Greek vase-painting was not lost upon Beardsley, but as yet he had scant chance or leisure to make a thorough study of it, as he was to do later, to the great enhancement of his powers; he was content as yet to acknowledge his debt to Greece through Anning Bell.

We know from Beardsley's letters to his old school that he was during this autumn at work upon drawings for Miss Burney's *Evelina* and, whether they have vanished or were never completed, on drawings for Hawthorne's *Tales* and Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling*.

Such writers as recall the early Beardsley recall him through the glamour that colours their backward glancing from the graveside of achieved genius. The " revelations on opening the portfolio " are written " after the event," when the contents of the portfolio have been forgotten and deluding memory flings amongst their drab performance masterpieces, rose-leafwise, from *The Rape of the Lock* and *The Savoy* for makeweight. Beardsley did not " arrive " at once—we are about to see him arrive. But once he found himself, his swift achievement is the more a marvel—almost a miracle.

It was fortunate for Dent that Beardsley flung himself at the achievement

of the *Morte d'Arthur* with almost mad enthusiasm. Beardsley knew that he had to " make good " or go down—and so back to the City. He poured forth his designs in the quiet of his candles' light, the blinds drawn, and London asleep—poured them forth in that secret atmosphere that detested an eye-witness to his craftsmanship and barred the door to all inquisitive eyes.

Most folk would reason that Beardsley, being free of the City, had now his whole day for creative work; but the lay mind rarely grasps the fact that true artistic utterance is largely compact of mood and is outside mere industry or intellectual desire to work. To have more time meant a vast increase in Beardsley's powers to brood upon his art but not to create it. Not a bit of it. He was about the most sociable butterfly that ever enjoyed the sunshine of life as it passed. By day he haunted the British Museum, the bookshops, the print-shops, or paid social calls, delighting to go to the Café Royal and such places. No one ever saw him work. He loved music above all the arts. In the coming years, when he was to be a vogue for a brief season, people would ask when Beardsley worked—he was everywhere—and he only laughed gleefully for answer, his pose being that he never worked nor had need to work. He had as yet no footing in the houses of the great; and it was fortunate for his art that he had not, for he was steeping himself in all that touched or enhanced that art.

A great deal has been made of Beardsley's working only by candle-light; as a matter of fact there is nothing unusual in an artist, whether of the pen or the brush, who does not employ colour, making night into day. It is an affair of temperament, though of course Beardsley was quite justified in posing as a genius thereby if it helped him to recognition.

Beardsley's career had made it impossible for him to work except by night; and by the time his day was free to him he was set by habit into working by night. There would be nothing unnatural in his shutting out the daylight and lighting his candles if he were seized by the mood to work by day. He shared with far greater artists than he the dislike of being seen at work, and is said to have kept out even his mother and sister when at work; and, like Turner, when caught at work he hurriedly hid away the tools of his craft; pens, ink, paper, and drawing upon the paper were all hidden away at once. No one has ever been known to see him at work. Beardsley, when he sat down to his table to create art, came to his effort with no cant about inspiration.

He did not draw from a model. He set himself an idea to fulfil, and the paper on which he rough-pencilled that idea was the only sketch he made for the completed design. We can judge better by his unfinished designs—than from any record by gossip—that he finished his drawing in ink on the piece of paper on which he began it in pencil, without sketch or study—that he began by vague pencil scrawls and rough lines to indicate the general rhythm and composition and balance of the thing as a whole—that he then drew in with firmer pencil lines the main design—and then inked in the pen-line and masses. When the pen and ink had done their work, the pencil vanished under the eliminating rubber. The well-known drawing of a *Girl* belonging to Mr. Evans shows Beardsley selecting and making firm in pencil the line of the face from amidst his rough pencil scrawls, to guide him when he should use the pen to eliminate all superfluous lines and employ the simplest stroke of the pen's ink.

Now, Beardsley being a born poser, and seeing that the philistine mind of the hack-journalist was focussed on getting a " story," astutely made much of his being able to work only by candle-light as he drew the journalistic romance-mongering eyes to his two candlesticks of the Empire period, and encouraged their suggestion that he wrought the masterpiece only under their spell. It was good copy; and it all spread him by advertisement. Besides, it sounded fearsomely " original," and held a taint of genius. And there was something almost deliciously wicked in the subtle confession : " I am happiest when the lamps of the town have been lit." He must be at all costs " the devil of a fellow."

Beardsley arranged the room in his father's and mother's house which was his first studio so that it should fit his career as artist. He received his visitors in this scarlet room, seated at a small table on which stood two tall, tapering candlesticks—the candlesticks without which he could not work. And his affectations and artificialities of pose and conversation were at this time almost painful. But he was very young and very ambitious, and had not yet achieved much else whereon to lean for reputation.

His rapid increase of power—and one now begins to understand Vallance's enthusiasm—induced Vallance to make a last bid to win the favour of Morris for Beardsley. It was about the Yuletide of 1892, half a year after Morris's

rebuff had so deeply wounded Beardsley, that Vallance, who could not persuade him to move another foot towards Morris's house a second time, induced the young fellow to let him take a printed proof from the *Morte d'Arthur* of " The Lady of the Lake telling Arthur of the Sword Excalibur " to show to Morris. Several of Morris's friends were present when Vallance arrived. Now again we must try to get into Morris's mind. He was shown a black and white decoration for the printed page made by a youth who, a few months before, had been so utterly ignorant of the world-shattering revolution in book-making at the Kelmscott Press that he had actually offered his services on the strength of a trumpery grotesque in poor imitation of a Japanese drawing, which of course would have fitted quaintly with Caxton's printed books ! but here, by Thor and by Hammersmith, was the self-same young coxscomb, mastering the Kelmscott idea and in one fell drawing surpassing it and making the whole achievement of Morris's earnest workers look tricky and meretricious and unutterably dull ! Of course there was a storm of anger from Morris.

Morris's hot indignation at what he called " an act of usurpation " which he could not permit revealed to Vallance the sad fact that any hope of these two men working together was futile. " A man ought to do his own work," roared Morris, quite forgetting how he was as busy as a burglar filching from Caxton and mediæval Europe. However, so hotly did Morris feel about the whole business that it was only at Sir Edward Burne-Jones's earnest urging that he was prevented from writing an angry remonstrance to Dent.

How Morris fulfilled his vaunted aim of lifting printing to its old glory by attacking any and everybody else who likewise strove is not easy to explain. But here we may pause for a moment to discuss a point much misunderstood in Beardsley's career. Vallance, a man of high integrity and noble ideals, sadly deplores the loss both to Beardsley and to Morris himself through Morris treating the young fellow as a rival instead of an ally. But whatever loss it may have been to Morris, it was as a fact an unqualified gain to Beardsley. Beardsley pricked the bubble of the mediæval " fake " in books ; but had he instead entered into the Morris circle he would have begun and ended as a clever imitator. He had the craftsmanship to surpass the Kelmscott Press ; but he had in his being no whit in common with mediævalism. Art has nothing to do with beauty or ugliness or the things that Morris and his age mistook for art. It is a far more vast and mighty significance than all that.

And the tragic part of Beardsley's destiny lay in this: he had either to sink his powers in the "art-fake" that his clean-souled and noble-hearted friend took to be art, or he had to pursue the vital and true art of uttering what emotions life most intensely revealed to him, even though, in the doing, he had to wallow with swine. And let us have no cant about it: even the "mediæval" decorations for the *Morte d'Arthur* were soon revealing that overwhelming eroticism, that inquisition into sex, which dominated his whole artistic utterance from the day he turned his back on the City and became a professional artist. Beardsley would never have been, could never have been, a great artist in the Morris circle, or in seeking to restore a dead age through mediæval research. That there was no need for him to go to the other extreme and allow his art to pander to the wishes and tastes of men of questionable habits, low codes of honour, and licentious life, is quite true; but the sad part of the business was, as we shall see, that it was precisely just such men who alone enabled struggling genius to create his master-work where others would have let him starve and the music die in him unsung.

William Morris was to die in the October of 1896, four years thereafter, but he was to live long enough to see the youth he envied outrival him in his "mediæval fake"—was to see Beardsley find himself—and give to the world in *The Savoy* a series of decorations that have made his name immortal and placed his art amongst the supreme achievement of the age, where William Morris's vaunted decorated printed page is become an elaborate boredom.

Morris was not the only one who baffled the efforts of Vallance to get Beardsley a hearing. By John Lane, who was to bring him to fame, of all men, fantastically enough, he was also to be rejected! Beardsley was always full of schemes and plans; one of these at the moment was the illustrating of Meredith's *Shaving of Shagpat*—a desire to which he returned and on which he harped again and again. Vallance, hoping that John Lane, a member of the firm of Elkin Mathews and John Lane, then new and unconventional publishers, would become the bridge to achievement, brought about a meeting between Beardsley and John Lane at a small gathering at Vallance's rooms as Yuletide drew near. But John Lane was not impressed; and nothing came of it. It was rather an irony of fate that Beardsley, who resented this rejection by John Lane, for some reason, with considerable bitterness, was in a twelve-

month to be eagerly sought after by John Lane to their mutual success, increase in reputation, triumph, and wide advertisement.

However, neither the frown of William Morris, nor the icy aloofness of Watts, nor the indifference of John Lane could chill the ardour of the exultant Aubrey Beardsley. He was free. He had two big commissions. His health greatly improved. He was happy in his work. Having mastered the possibilities and the limitations of the Kelmscott book decoration, he concentrated on surpassing it. At once his line began to put on strength. The Japanese convention tickled him—here he could use his line without troubling about floor or ceiling or perspective in which to place his figures. He could relieve the monotony of the heavy *Morte d'Arthur* convention by drawing fantasies in this Japanesque vein for *Bon Mots*, both conventions rooted whimsically enough in Burne-Jonesesques. And so it came that his first half-year as an artist saw him pouring out work of a quality never before even hinted at as being latent in him.

Such was the state of affairs that now, with the black portfolio containing work really worth looking at under his arm, Beardsley in his twenty-first year was to be led by Vallance into the inestimable good fortune of meeting the man who was to bring his achievement into the public eye and champion his interests at every hand his life long.

The year before Beardsley left Brighton Grammar School to enter upon a commercial career in the City, in 1887, there had left the City and entered upon a literary life, as sub-editor of *The Art Journal*, C. Lewis Hind. Five years of such apprenticeship done, Hind had given up the magazine in 1892 in order to establish a new art magazine for students. Hind had had a copy privately printed as a sort of "dummy," which he showed to his friend and fellow-clubman John Lane, then setting up his sign as a publisher. It so happened that a very astute and successful business man in the Japanese trade called Charles Holme, who lived at the Red House at Bexley Heath, the one-time home of William Morris, had an ambition to create an art magazine. John Lane, the friend of both men, brought Hind and Holme together—and in the December of 1892 the contract was signed and *The Studio*, as it was christened by Hind to Holme's great satisfaction, began to take shape. Hind saw the commercial *flair* of Charles Holme as his best asset—Holme saw Hind in the editorial chair as *his* best asset. . . .

So the New Year of 1893 dawned. It was the habit of Lewis Hind to go of a Sunday afternoon to the tea-time gatherings of the literary and artistic friends of Wilfred and Alice Meynell at their house in Palace Court; and it was on one of these occasions, early in the January of 1893, that Aymer Vallance entered with a tall, slender, "hatchet-faced," pallid youth. Hind, weary of pictures and drawings over which he had been poring for weeks in his search for subjects for his new magazine, was listening peacefully to the music of Vernon Blackburn, who was playing one of his own songs at the piano, when the stillness of the room was broken by the entry of the two new visitors. In an absent mood Hind suddenly became aware that Vallance had moved to his side with his young friend. He looked up at the youth who stood by Vallance's side, and became aware of a lanky figure with a big nose, and yellow hair plastered down in a "quiff" or fringe across his forehead much in the style of Phil May—a pallid, silent young man, but self-confident, self-assured, alert and watchful—with the inevitable black portfolio under his arm—the insurance clerk Aubrey Beardsley. Hind, disinclined for art babble, weary of undiscovered "geniuses" being foisted upon him, but melting under the hot enthusiasm of Vallance, at last asked the pale young man to show him his drawings. On looking through Beardsley's portfolio, Hind at once decided that here at any rate was work of genius. Now let us remember that this sophisticated youth of the *blasé* air was not yet twenty-one. In that portfolio, Hind tells us, were the two frontispieces for *Le Morte d'Arthur*, the *Siegfried Act II*, the *Birthday of Madame Cigale—Les Revenants de Musique*—some *Salome* drawings—with several chapter-headings and tail-pieces for the *Morte d'Arthur*. Hind's memory probably tricked him as to the *Salome* drawings; for, in refreshing his memory, likely as not, he looked at the first number of *The Studio* published three months later and blundered accordingly, as Wilde's *Salome* did not see print until February, a full month afterwards, and was quite unknown.

However, Hind at once offered the pages of his new art venture, *The Studio*, to the delighted youth. What was more, he arranged that Beardsley should bring his drawings the next morning to *The Studio* offices. When he did so, Charles Holme was quick to support Hind; indeed, to encourage the excited Beardsley, he there and then bought the drawings themselves from him.

Hind commissioned Joseph Pennell, as being one of the widest-read critics, to write the appreciation of the designs and blazon Beardsley abroad —and whilst Pennell was frankly more than a little perplexed by all the enthusiasm poured into his ears, he undertook the job. But Hind, though he remained to the end Beardsley's friend and greatly liked him, was not to be his editor after all. William Waldorf Astor, the millionaire, had bought the daily *Pall Mall Gazette* and the weekly *Pall Mall Budget* and was launching a new monthly to be called the *Pall Mall Magazine*. Lord Brownlow's nephew, Harry Cust, appointed editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, asked Hind to become editor of the weekly *Budget* at a handsome salary; and Hind, thus having to look about of a sudden for someone to replace himself as editor of the new art magazine about to be launched, found Gleeson White to take command of *The Studio* in his stead. But even as he set Gleeson White in the vacant editorial chair, Hind took Beardsley with him also to what was to be Hind's three years' editorship of the *Pall Mall Budget*, for which, unfortunately, Beardsley wrought little but such unmitigated trash as must have somewhat dumbfounded Hind.

So the first number of *The Studio* was to appear in the April of 1893, glorifying a wonderful youth—his name Aubrey Beardsley !

It was thus also, through Lewis Hind, that Beardsley had the good fortune to meet Gleeson White. Of the men who made the artistic and literary life of London at this time, Gleeson White was one of the largest of vision, the soundest in taste, the most generous in encouragement. A strangely modest man, he was said to have invented much of the wit of the 'nineties given to others' tongues, for he had the quaint conceit of crediting the man with uttering the witticism who looked as if he ought to have said it. That was usurpation which men like Whistler and Wilde could forgive—and they forgave Gleeson White much. Gleeson White, who was well known in the Arts and Crafts movement of the day that hinged on Morris, leaped with joy at Hind's offer to make him editor of a magazine that was to voice the aspirations and to proclaim the achievements of the Arts and Crafts men.

On the eve of publication Hind and Gleeson White asked for a cover design for *The Studio* from the much-gratified Beardsley, who went home thrilled with the prospect that set his soul on fire—here was *réclame !* as he

always preferred to call being advertised, or what the studios call "being boosted." Indeed, was not Beardsley to appear in the first number of *The Studio* after Frank Brangwyn, then beginning to come to the front, in a special article devoted to his work by Pennell, the most vocal of critics, with illustrations from the portfolio in his several styles—the Japanesque, and the mediæval *Morte d'Arthur* black-letter? Was it not to be a tribute to "a new illustrator"? In Pennell there stepped into Beardsley's life a man who could make his voice heard, and, thanks to Hind, he was to champion Beardsley through rain and shine, through black and sunny days. And, what was of prodigious value to Beardsley, Pennell did not gush irrelevantly nor overrate his worth, as did so many—he gave it just and fair and full value.

All the same we must not make too much of Beardsley's indebtedness to the first number of *The Studio* in bringing him before the public. Pennell had the advantage of seeing a portfolio which really did contain very remarkable work—at the same time it was scarcely world-shattering—and it is to Pennell's eternal credit for artistic honesty and critical judgment that he did not proclaim it at anything more than its solid value. Pennell was writing for a new magazine of arts and crafts; and his fierce championship of process reproduction was as much a part of his aim as was Beardsley's art—and all of us who have been saved from the vile debauching of our line-work by the average wood-engravers owe it largely to Pennell that process reproduction won through—and not least of all Beardsley. What Pennell says about Beardsley is sober and just and appreciative; but it was when Beardsley developed far greater powers that Pennell championed him, most fitly, to the day he lay down and died.

The first number of *The Studio* did not appear until the April of 1893; it was the first public recognition of Aubrey Beardsley, it is true; but an utterly ridiculous legend has grown around *The Studio* that it made Beardsley famous. It did absolutely nothing of the kind. *The Studio* itself was no particular success, far less any article in it. Tom, Dick, and Harry did not understand it; were not interested greatly in the arts or crafts; and particularly were they bored by mediæval stiffness, dinginess, gloom, and solemn uncomfortable pomp. Even the photographers had not at that time "gone into oak." It was only in our little narrow artistic and literary world—and a very narrow inner circle at that—where *The Studio* caused any talk and

Beardsley interested not very excitedly. We had grown rather *blasé* to mediævalism; had begun to find it out; and the Japanesque was a somewhat dinted toy—we preferred the Japanese masterpieces of the Japanese even to the fine bastard Japanesques of Beardsley. So that, even in studio and literary salon, and at the tea-tables of the very earnest people with big red or yellow ties, untidy corduroy suits, and bilious aspirations after "beauty," Beardsley at best was only one of the many subjects when he was a subject at all. It was bound to be so—he had done no great work as far as the public knew. Lewis Hind, who at the New Year had gone from *The Studio* offices to edit the *Pall Mall Budget*, in a fit of generous enthusiasm commissioned Beardsley to make the caricatures or portrait-sketches at the play or opera or the like which we have already surveyed; and from the February of 1893, for some few weeks, Beardsley, utterly incompetent for the journalistic job, unfortunately damaged his reputation and nearly brought it to the gutter with this series of the most wretched drawings imaginable—drawings with scarce one redeeming shred of value—work almost inconceivable as being from the same hands that were decorating the *Morte d'Arthur*, which, however, the public had not yet seen, for the book did not begin to appear in print until the mid-year. But, as a matter of fact, most of the designs for *Morte d'Arthur* were made by the time that Beardsley began his miserable venture in the *Pall Mall Budget*. The first volume of *Bon Mots* appeared in the April of 1893—the *Sydney Smith and Sheridan* volume—although few heard of or saw the little book, and none paid it respect. It was pretty poor stuff.

Though the *Morte d'Arthur* was in large part done before *The Studio* eulogy by Pennell appeared in this April of 1893, otherwise the eulogy would never have been written, it is well to cast a glance at Beardsley's art as it was first revealed to a fairly indifferent public in *The Studio* article. There are examples from the *Morte d'Arthur*, of which the very fine chapter-heading of the knights in combat on foot amongst the dandelion-like leaves of a forest, with their sword-like decoration, was alone enough to have made a sound reputation. The most mediocre design of the lot, a tedious piece of Renaissance mimicry of Mantegna called *The Procession of Joan of Arc entering Orleans*, had been, curiously enough, the favourite work of Beardsley's own choice a year gone by, when he made it—so far had he now advanced beyond

this commonplace untidy emptiness! Yet the writers on art seem to have been more impressed by this futility than by the far more masterly *Morte d'Arthur* decorations. If the writers were at sea, the public can scarce be blamed. The *Siegfried Act II* of mid-1892, which Beardsley had given to his patron Burne-Jones, shows the excellent, if weird and fantastic, combination by Beardsley of his Japanesque and Burne-Jonesesque mimicry—it is his typically early or "hairy-line" Japanesque, hesitant in stroke and thin in quality. The *Birthday of Madame Cigale* and *Les Revenants de Musique* show the Japanesque more asserting itself over the mock-mediæval, and are akin to *Le Débris d'un Poète* and *La Femme Incomprise*. But there was also a Japanesque in *The Studio* which was to have an effect on Beardsley's destiny that he little foresaw! There had been published in the February of 1893 in French the play called *Salome* by Oscar Wilde, which made an extraordinary sensation in literary circles and in the Press. Throughout the newspapers was much controversy about the leopard-like ecstasy of Salome when the head of John the Baptist has been given to her on a salver: "J'ai baisé ta bouche, Iokanaan; j'ai baisé ta bouche." Beardsley, struck by the lines, made his now famous Japanesque drawing, just in time to be included in *The Studio* which was to appear in April. It was this design that, a few weeks later, decided Elkin Mathews and John Lane that in Beardsley they had found the destined illustrator of the English *Salome* translated by Lord Alfred Douglas, which was soon to appear. In that *Salome* was to be a marvellous significance for Aubrey Beardsley.

It is well to compare the Studio *Salome* with its variant in the book and to note the rapid development of Beardsley's art from the fussy flourishing design of this *Salome* drawing in *The Studio* to the more severe and restrained edition of the same design that was so soon to appear in the book. The hairy Japanesque line has departed.

Note also another fact. The title of the article published in *The Studio* first number shows that in March 1893, when it was written at latest, Beardsley had decided to drop his middle name of Vincent; and the V forthwith disappears from the initials and signature to his work—the last time it was employed was on the indifferent large pencil drawing of *Sandro Botticelli* made in 1893 about the time that *The Studio* was to appear, as Vallance tells us, having been made by Beardsley to prove his own contention that an artist

made his figures unconsciously like himself, whereupon at Vallance's challenge he proceeded to build a Sandro Botticelli from Botticelli's paintings. Vallance is unlikely to have made a mistake about the date, but the work has the hesitation and the lack of drawing and the indecision of the year before.

Above all we shall see when we come to the *Salome* that an absolutely new style has been born—that "faked" mediævalism is dead—and buried. Whistler's Peacock-room has triumphed. That is why one questions whether it were possible that Beardsley's visit to the Peacock-room was at this time and not so early as was supposed. At any rate, Beardsley was about to mimic Whistler's peacocks so superbly painted on the shutters of the Peacock-room as he had heretofore imitated Burne-Jones.

By his twenty-first birthday, then, Beardsley had practically done with the *Morte d'Arthur ;* and it was only by the incessant prayers and supplications of Dent and the solemn urging of Frederick Evans to fulfil his word of honour and his bond, that Beardsley was persuaded, grudgingly, to make another design for it. He was wearied to tears by the book, and had utterly cast mediævalism from him before he was through it. He was now intensely and feverishly concentrated on the development of the Japanesque; and he was for ever poring over the Greek vase-paintings at the British Museum. Another point must be stressed, if we are to understand Beardsley; with returning bodily vigour he was encouraging that erotic mania so noticeable in gifted consumptives, so that eroticism became the dominant emotion and significance in life to him. He was steeping himself in study of phallic worship —and when all's said, the worship of sex has held a very important place in the earlier civilizations, and is implicit in much that is not so early.

It was a fortunate thing indeed for Dent, as matters turned out, that he had procured most of the decorations he wanted for the *Morte d'Arthur* in Beardsley's first few months of vigorous enthusiasm for the book in the dying end of the year of 1892, to which half-year the *Morte d'Arthur* almost wholly belongs in Beardsley's achievement. Dent was thereby enabled to launch on the publication of the parts in the June of 1893, about the time that Beardsley, changing his home, was to be turning his back on mediævalism and Burne-Jonesism for ever. It is obvious to such as search the book with critical eye that the *Morte d'Arthur* was never completed—we find designs doing duty

again towards the end more than once—but Dent had secured enough to make this possible without offensive reiteration.

There appeared in the *Pall Mall Magazine* for June 1893, drawn in April 1893, as the first *Studio* number was appearing, a design known as *The Neophyte*, or, to give it its full affected name, "*Of a Neophyte, and how the Black Art was revealed unto him by the Fiend Asomuel.*" It was followed in the July number by a drawing of May 1893 called *The Kiss of Judas*. Both drawings reveal a marked change in handling, and the *Neophyte* a rare firmness of line and form, and a strange hauntingness and atmosphere heretofore not seen. Beardsley had striven to reach it again and again in his Burne-Jonesesque frontispiece to the *Morte d'Arthur* and kindred works in his "hairy line"; but the work of Carlos Schwabe and other so-called symbolists was being much talked of at this time, and several French illustrators were reaching quite remarkable effects through it—it was not lost on Beardsley's quick mind, especially its grotesque possibilities.

It is a peculiar irony that attributes Beardsley's *Morte d'Arthur* phase to 1893–4; for whilst it is true that it was from mid-1893 that the book began to be published, Beardsley had turned his back upon it for months—indeed his principal drawings had been made for it in late 1892, and only with difficulty could they be extracted from him even in early 1893! The second of the two elaborate drawings in his "hairy line" called *The Questing Beast* is dated by Beardsley himself "March 8, 1893"—as for 1894, it would have been impossible for Beardsley by that time to make such a drawing. Even as it is, the early 1893 decorations differ in handling from the more mediæval or Burne-Jonesesque decorations of late 1892.

The two cover-designs for *The Studio* No. I in April 1893 were obviously drawn at the same time as the design for the paper covers of the *Morte d'Arthur*—in the early spring of 1893. They could well be exchanged without the least loss. They practically write Finis to his *Morte d'Arthur* phase. They make a good full stop to the record of Beardsley's achievement in his twentieth year.

There is a story told of Dent's anxieties over Beardsley's exasperating procrastination in delivering the later drawings for the *Morte d'Arthur* on the eve of its appearing in numbers. Dent called on Mrs. Beardsley to beg her influence with Beardsley to get on with the work. Mrs. Beardsley went

upstairs at once to see Beardsley, who was still in bed, and to remonstrate with him on Dent's behalf. Beardsley, but half awake, lazily answered his mother's chiding with :

> There was a young man with a salary
> Who had to do drawings for Malory:
> When they asked him for more, he replied, "Why? Sure
> You've enough, as it is, for a gallery."

As Beardsley's self-chosen master, Watteau, had played with mimicry of the Chinese genius in his Chinoiseries, so Beardsley, faithful to Watteau, played with mimicry of the Japanese genius. And as Whistler had set the vogue in his Japanesques by adopting a Japanesque mark of a butterfly for signature, so we have seen that Beardsley, not to be outdone in originality, had invented for himself his now famous "Japanesque mark" of the three candles, with three flames, in the more elaborate later marks adding rounded puffs of candle-smoke. To Beardsley his candles were as important a part of the tools of his craftsmanship as were his pen and paper and Chinese ink; and it was but a fitting tribute to his light that he should make of it the emblem of his signature. But whether the "Japanesque mark" be candles or not, from the time he began to employ the Japanesque convention alongside of his mediævalism, for three years, until, as we shall see, he was expelled from *The Yellow Book*—his twentieth, twenty-first and twenty-second years—we shall find him employing the "Japanesque mark"—sometimes in addition to his name. This "Japanesque mark" is important.

The early "Japanesque mark" of Beardsley's twentieth year (mid-1892 to mid-1893) we have seen to be stunted, crude, and ill-shaped, and he employed it indifferently and incongruously on any type of his designs, whether *Morte d'Arthur* mediævalism or the Japanesque grotesques of his *Bon Mots*. And we have seen that it was in the middle of his twentieth year—he last used it, in fact, in the February of 1893—that he dropped the initial V for Vincent out of his signature. He had employed A. V. B. in his formative years. He signs henceforth as A. B. or A. Beardsley or even as Aubrey B.

In mid-1893, at twenty-one, he was about to launch upon his *Salome* designs, as weary of the *Bon Mots* grotesques as of the *Morte d'Arthur* mediævalism; and we shall see his "Japanesque mark" become long, slender, and graceful, often elaborate—the V quite departed from his signature.

I have dwelt at length upon Beardsley's "Japanesque mark," or, as he called it, his "trade-mark," since his many forgers make the most amusing blunders by using the "Japanesque mark" in particular on forgeries of later styles, when he had wholly abandoned it!

The "Japanesque mark" of the three candles not only belongs to a very marked stage of Beardsley's career, but it is of two forms, each employed, of course, in an even shorter stage; thus becoming a sad stumbling-block to the forgers.

From mid-1892 to mid-1893, Beardsley then had advanced in craftsmanship by leaps and bounds; nevertheless he was unknown at twenty-one except to a small artistic circle. The *Bon Mots* grotesques, mostly done in the last half of 1892, began to appear, the first volume, *Sydney Smith and Sheridan*, in the April of 1893; the second volume at the year's end, *Lamb and Douglas Jerrold*, in December 1893; and the third, the last volume, *Foote and Hooke*, in the February of 1894. The *Morte d'Arthur* began to be published in parts in June 1893. The feverish creation of the mediæval designs in the late part of 1892 alongside of the *Bon Mots* grotesques had exhausted Beardsley's enthusiasm, and his style evaporated with the growth of his weariness—by mid-1893 he was finding the *Morte d'Arthur* "very long-winded." And what chilled him most, the general public seemed indifferent to both—yet Beardsley knew full well that his whole interest lay in publicity.

We may here examine the act of default to complete the *Morte d'Arthur* for which Beardsley has been very severely censured by some. It is a large question and a serious question—but it *is* a question. It depends wholly on whether he could fulfil his bond artistically or not, as well as on whether that bond were a just bargain. It is rather natural for the layman and the business man to blame Beardsley for shrinking from fulfilling his bond as regards a contract for a long sequence of drawings to illustrate a book; indeed it is likely enough that a quite honest jury of good men and true might decide at law that he ought to be compelled to complete them or suffer penalties for the breach. Even the judge might so charge them to decide. But it is not quite so simple a matter as it looks to the lay mind for an artist to fulfil

a long contract which, at the time of his making it, he enthusiastically cherishes and fully, indeed eagerly, intends to carry out.

A work of art is not like a manufactured article that can be produced indefinitely to a pattern. The act of art is creation, not imitation. Added to this is the fact that if an accomplished artist try to draw anything as a child draws it—an engine puffing smoke or a cow or the like—he can never recapture quite the naivety and fumbling awkwardness of his childhood; however cleverly done, there is now a firmness and sureness of line that he cannot rid from his hand's skill. This is to put it exaggeratively, of course; but it applies for all that. The boy's treble breaks to the raucous accent of youth and passes to the deeper resonance of voice in the man; and once broken can never be recaptured.

It is only just to Beardsley to recognise that it might require a frantic and maddening effort of will and hand's skill, as indeed with any artist, but particularly with Beardsley, to go back and employ a handling and style that he has left behind him and rejected when he has advanced to such skill as in *The Neophyte*, let us say. It is like asking a man to put the enthusiasm and intensity of purpose of a struggle for victory into an endeavour after he has won the victory. It is likely enough that Beardsley himself fretted that he could not do it. But it is worth noting that Beardsley had developed with astonishing rapidity in style and craftsmanship during his work upon the mediævalism of the *Morte d'Arthur*—that he had done so much that by the time he came near to the end of the four or five hundred drawings he had advanced beyond the style he had created for them. His earliest illustrations which were used for page pictures were in the Burne-Jonesesque convention combined with the fussy, Japanesque hairy line. These, as a matter of fact, do not go too strikingly well even with the rich "fat blacks" and strong line of the rest of the decorations. But even as he wrought his final decorations, a newer style, moving towards the Greek vase phase, reveals itself.

But more remarkable still was his next advance, as we are about to see—the complete change in style and craftsmanship of his Japanesque phase in the now famous *Salome* drawings. Yet this new *Salome* phase was to last even a shorter time than his *Morte d'Arthur* phase, and he was to pass out of it and advance beyond it to his Greek vase phase in *The Yellow Book* to create a style wholly impossible to set within the covers that held the designs either for

the *Morte d'Arthur* or the *Salome*. For I presume that even the layman will recognise that drawings in the *Salome* convention could not possibly have been placed on the pages of the *Morte d'Arthur*.

Indeed we shall see Beardsley erring in the other direction, and endeavouring to keep his covenant at all costs when two of his drawings for *Salome* were condemned; for whilst his will compelled him to make two new drawings as substitutes in fulfilment of his covenant, and his hand's skill endeavoured to create them in the same convention, he had so markedly advanced to a new creative intention and a new hand's skill that he could not recall the atmosphere of the thing he had wrought so well; he had left it behind him for ever, and by the very fulfilling of his covenant he came near to wreck the design of *Salome* as a complete whole! We shall see the two new drawings which he threw in as makeweight, though quite good in themselves, to be utterly alien to the book and disfiguring it. We could not have a more marked proof that so rapidly was Beardsley advancing from stage to stage of artistic utterance that even when he attempted to go back, and did not refuse to go back, he found that with the best will in the world he could not do so. The treble of the boy was broken and was wholly departed.

Beardsley may have been more torn between his honour as a good citizen and his honour as a great artist than he is likely to have been given the credit for having been; but he had to choose, willy-nilly, between his commercial honour and the fulfilling of his genius. A choice was compelled upon him, owing to the hardship that his poverty thrust upon him in having accepted long contracts—or rather contracts that took time to fulfil. Before blaming Beardsley for not fulfilling his commercial obligations, it is only just to ask, as we have done, whether he could have fulfilled them even had he desired so to do. Was it possible for him, passing swiftly into a rapid sequence of artistic developments, to step back into a craftsmanship which he had outgrown, as a game is restarted at the whistle of a referee? If he had not pushed on, one thing is certain, Beardsley's art and genius and his high achievement would have suffered—and Death was beckoning to him not to tarry. Either the commercial advantage of his publishers or the artistic achievement of his genius had to go. Which ought to go? Put it in another way: which is the greater good to the world, the achievement of genius or the fulfilment of the commercial contract of genius to the letter for the profit of the trade of

one man? If, instead of creating a great art, Beardsley had what is called "got religion" and gone forth to benefit mankind instead of completing his worldly duties by doing a given number of drawings for a book, would he deserve censure?

Next let us glance at the position as regards whether Beardsley were receiving a just and sufficient wage to enable him to work to his contract. The prices paid to Beardsley as a budding artist would likely enough be low. Would they, however, be a living wage for him when he was wholly dependent upon them for his daily bread? Even a genius must live. And genius cannot create great art if it be without means of livelihood—mere contracts will not feed him or give him shelter for the creation of the art contracted for.

Of the 538 to 544 or so decorations for the *Morte d'Arthur*, if we include the framing designs as separate drawings, several are repeated—some more than once. Let us take 500 as the rough estimate, just for argument. Calculating roughly that he made 500 drawings for the *Morte d'Arthur*, did he get a living wage for them? Did he get a bare subsistence, say of a guinea a drawing? Supposing he got £100 for them, then he would be working at something like four shillings a drawing! Two hundred pounds would be eight shillings a drawing; £300 would be twelve shillings. His bank-book alone can reveal to us what he earned. Now, if Beardsley would make 500 drawings in three months' work, even a couple of hundred pounds would be a living wage, where it would not be if it took him a year's hard work. But supposing he did not get a living wage! The law will not permit a usurer to charge even a scapegrace waster more than a certain usury. If so, then it is not right nor moral to contract with an artist to work for a beggar's wage. We cannot judge Beardsley until we know the whole truth. The quality of mercy is not strained. His "pound of flesh" may be an abomination, though commercial men may hold up self-righteous hands in protestation, Shylock-wise, that he did not pay his pound of flesh. . . .

Before we leave the *Morte d'Arthur* let us remember that artists and authors are often prone to ingratitude towards those who have led their steps to the ladder of Fame—and Beardsley was no exception. It was Frederick Evans who led Beardsley to the gate of an artistic career—without Evans

there had been no Dent. It was John M. Dent who opened the gates for Beardsley to pass through to that realm which was to bring him the bays. Had it not been for Dent he would have died with his song wholly unsung—there would have been for him no *Studio* " réclame," no *Yellow Book*, no *Salome*, no *Savoy*. Dent, employing, with rare vision, the budding genius of the youth, brought forth an edition of Sir Thomas Malory's immortal *Morte d'Arthur* which is a triumph for English bookmaking—he gave us the supreme edition that can never be surpassed by mortal hands—he did so in a form within the reach of the ordinary man—and in the doing he made the much-vaunted work of William Morris and his fellow-craftsmen appear but second-rate, mechanical, and over-ornate toys for millionaires.

THE PEACOCK SKIRT (SALOME)

VI

THE JAPANESQUES

Mid-1893 to the New Year of 1894—Twenty-One

"*Salome*"

BY mid-1893 Beardsley was on the edge of manhood.

We have seen that, a year or two gone by, he is said to have paid a visit to Whistler's notorious Peacock-room at Prince's Gate. He had really known Japanese art but in its cheapest forms and in superficial fashion, and the bastard Japanesque designs for the decoration of this mock-Japanesque room greatly influenced Beardsley without much critical challenge from him, especially the tedious, attenuated furniture and the thin, square, slender bars of the wooden fitments. They appear in his designs of interiors for some time after this. His Japanesque *Caricature of Whistler* on a seat, catching butterflies, is of this time.

Now, the letter to his musical friend Scotson-Clark, describing his visit to Whistler's Peacock-room, is evidently undated, but it is put down to the year of 1891. It may be so. But one suspects that it was of the early part of 1893—at any rate, if earlier, it is curious that its effect on Beardsley's art lay in abeyance for a couple of years, and then suddenly, in the spring and summer of 1893, his art and craftsmanship burst forth in designs of the *Salome* founded frankly upon the convention of the peacocks on the shutters painted by Whistler for the Peacock-room. Why should this undisguised mimicry of Whistler have been delayed for two years?

But it was—as the slyly-hung Japanese prints upon his walls at this time revealed to the seeing eye—it was now to the work of the better Japanese masters that he chiefly owed his passing pupilage to Japan. The erotic designs of the better Japanese artists, not being saleable for London drawing-rooms, were low-priced and within Beardsley's reach. His own intellectual and moral eroticism was fiercely attracted by the erotic Japanese designs; indeed

it was the eroticism of such Japanese masters that drew Beardsley to them quite as much as their wonderful rhythmic power to express sexual moods and adventures. It was from the time that Beardsley began to collect these Japanese prints by Utamaro and the rest that he gave rein to those leering features and libidinous ecstacies that became so dominating a part of his Muse. These erotic designs Beardsley himself used to call by the sophisticated title of " galants." The Greek vase-paintings were to add to this erotic utterance an increased power later on.

We shall now realise more clearly why it was a fortunate thing for Dent, when he began to publish the *Morte d'Arthur* in parts in the June of 1893, that he had secured the bulk of his illustrations; for Elkin Mathews and John Lane commissioned the young fellow to decorate the Englished edition of Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, translated by Lord Alfred Douglas. Beardsley leaped at it—not only as giving him scope for fantastic designs, but even more from the belief that, the public hotly disputing over Wilde's play already, he would come into the public eye. Elkin Mathews and John Lane showed fine judgment in their choice, founding their decision on the Japanesque drawing that Beardsley had made either on reading the French edition, or upon reading the widespread criticisms of the French edition by Wilde published in the February of 1893, illustrating the lines that raised so hot a controversy in the Press, " j'ai baisé ta bouche, Iokanaan; j'ai baisé ta bouche," which, as we have seen, had appeared as one of the several illustrations to Pennell's appreciation of " A New Illustrator " at the birth of *The Studio* in the April of 1893, soon thereafter.

Beardsley flung himself at the work with eager enthusiasm, turning his back on all that he had done or undertaken to do. Whatever bitterness he may, somewhat unreasonably, have felt at his disappointment with John Lane, a year gone by, was now mollified by the recognition of his art in the commission for *Salome*.

Elkin Mathews and John Lane, at the Sign of the Bodley Head in Vigo Street, were developing a publishing house quite unlike the ordinary publisher's business of that day—they were encouraging the younger men or the less young who found scant support from the conventional makers of books; and they were bent on producing *belles lettres* in an attractive

and picturesque form. This all greatly appealed to Beardsley. He was modern of the moderns. The heavy antique splendour and solemnities of the Kelmscott reprints repulsed him nearly as much as the crass philistinism of the hack publishers.

On the other hand, Elkin Mathews and John Lane took Beardsley rather on trust. And again let us give them due credit by remembering that Beardsley was but little known.

It would be difficult to imagine a man less competent to create the true atmosphere of the times and Court of King Herod than Oscar Wilde—but he could achieve an Oxford-Athenian fantasy hung on Herodias as a peg. It would be as difficult to imagine a man less competent than Aubrey Beardsley to achieve the true atmosphere of the times of King Herod—but he knew it, and acted accordingly. What he could do, and did do, was to weave a series of fantastic decorations about Wilde's play which were as alien to the subject as was the play. Beardsley imagined it as a Japanese fantasy, as a bright Cockney would conceive Japan ; he placed his drama in the Japan of Whistler's Peacock-room ; he did not attempt to illustrate the play by scenes, indeed was not greatly interested in the play, any more, indeed, than in the *Morte d'Arthur*, but was wholly concerned with creating decorative schemes as a musician might create impressions in sound as stirred in his imagination by the suggestion of moods in the play—and he proceeded to lampoon the writer of it and to make a sequence of grotesques that pronounced the eroticism of the whole conception. The Wardour Street jumble-sale of Greek terminal gods, Japanese costumes, and all the rest of it is part of the fun. Beardsley revels in the farce. But his beheaded John the Baptist is without a touch of tragic power.

It was a habit of Beardsley's champions, as well as an admission, if reluctantly granted, by his bitterest assailants throughout the Press, to praise Beardsley's line. What exactly they meant, most would have been hard put to it to explain—it was a sort of philistine literary or journalistic concession to the volapuk of the studios. As the fact of line is perhaps more obvious in the *Salome* drawings than in the *Savoy*, since the *Salome* designs are largely line unrelated to mass, there are even so-called critics to be found who place the *Salome* drawings at the topmost height of Beardsley's achievement to this day !

Most of this talk of Beardsley's line was sheer literary cant, but happened

to coincide with a reality. It is in the achievement of his line that Beardsley steps amongst the immortals, uttering his genius thereby. But the mere fact that any writer instances the *Salome* drawings in proof of the supreme achievement of Beardsley's line condemns him as a futile appraiser. Beardsley, by intense and dogged application and consummate taste, mastered the pen-line until this, the most mulish instrument of the artist's craftsmanship, at last surrendered its secrets to him, lost its hard rigidity, and yielded itself to his hand's desire; and he came to employ it with so exquisite a mastery that he could compel it at will to yield music like the clear, sustained notes of a violin. His line became sensuous—grave or gay. But he had not achieved that complete mastery when he undertook, nor when he completed, the *Salome*, wherein his line is yet hesitant, thin, trying to do too much, though there is music in it; but it is stolen music, and he cannot conjure with it as can the genius of Japan. Lived never yet a man who could surpass the thing he aped. There lies the self-dug grave of every academy. Set the *Salome* against the genius of Japan, and how small a thing it is. Something is lacking. It is not great music, it is full of reminiscences. It fails to capture the senses. It is "very clever for a young man." In *Salome* he got all that he could from the Japanese genius, an alien tongue; and in *The Stomach Dance*, the finest drawing of the sequence, he thrust the mimicry of the Japanese line as far as he could push it.

By the time he had achieved the *Salome* he was done with the Japanese mimicry. At the Yuletide of 1893 and thereafter, he turned his back upon it. He had discovered that line alone has most serious limitations; it baulked him, its keen worshipper, as he increased in power. And, as a matter of fact, it is in the coruscating originality of his invention, in the fertility of arrangement, and in the wide range of his flippant fantasy that the *Salome* designs reveal the increase of his powers, as they reveal the widening range of his flight. He had near done with mimicry. He was weary of it, as he was weary of the limitations of the Japanese convention, before he had completed the swiftly drawn designs with feverish, eager address in those few weeks of the late autumn; and by the time he came to write Finis to the work with the two drawings for the Title-page and List of Contents he was done with the groundless earth, the floating figures in the air, the vague intersweep of figures and draperies, the reckless lack of perspective. All are gone; and he plants

his figures on the firm earth where foothold is secure. He has been dwelling upon the mastery of the Greek vases. His triumphs in the firmer line and rich blacks of the *Morte d'Arthur* have trained and led him towards the Greeks—the severe selection of line and mass in his Japanesques has also led him thereto. He is about to give forth a line that is Beardsley's own voice and hand—neither the voice of Jacob nor the hand of Esau. When Beardsley laid down the book of *Salome* he had completed with it those two decorations which opened the gates to self-expression. He had found himself. His last great splendid mimicry was done. And as though to show his delight in it, he sat down and drew the exquisite *Burial of Salome* in a powder-box in the spirit of the eighteenth century whose child he was.

Salome finished, however, was not *Salome* published. Elkin Mathews and John Lane realised that the drawings could not appear without certain mitigations, though, as a matter of fact, there were but two particularly gross indecencies in them. Both men were anxious to achieve public recognition for Beardsley, and they knew him to be "difficult." However, Gleeson White was consulted, and he consulted me amongst others as an outside and independent opinion. Being greatly pleased by the suggestions that I made, Gleeson White put them forward, and told me they were warmly welcomed by the two troubled men who would have had to bear the brunt of the obloquy for any mistake or indiscretion. It was agreed, to the satisfaction of all concerned, that Beardsley should not touch the originals, but should make alterations on the few offending proofs, and that new blocks should then be made from the altered proofs, which, when all is said, required but little done to them, thereby preserving the original drawings intact. Thus the publication of them would offend no one's sense of decorum—however much they might exasperate the taste. The *Title Page* and *Enter Herodias* were slightly altered simply to avoid offence to public taste; but the *Toilette of Salome*, a fine design, which only required a very slight correction, had been completely withdrawn with the quite innocent but very second-rate design of *John and Salome*, and in place of the two had been inserted the *Black Cape* and *Georgian Toilette*, which were not only utterly out of place in the book, but tore the fabric of its whole design to pieces. This wilful act displayed in Beardsley a strain of inartistic mentality and vulgarity whereby he was prepared to sacrifice a fine achievement to a fit of stupid spleen and cheap conceit—for it was at once

clear that he resented any attempt to prevent his offending the public sense of decency, even though his supporters might suffer thereby. Now, whether the public were canting or not, whether they were correct or not, Beardsley would not have been the chief sufferer by his committing flagrant indecencies in the public thoroughfare, and more than one of the drawings were deliberately indecent. The public were canting in many ways; but they were also long-suffering, and Beardsley's literary advisers were solely concerned with the young artist's interests. Besides, vice has its cant as well as virtue. In any case, the mediocre *Black Cape* and the fine *Georgian Toilette*, quite apart from their intrinsic merit in themselves as drawings, were an act of that utter bourgeois philistinism which Beardsley so greatly affected to despise, committed by himself alone. He who will thus fling stones at his own credit and dignity has scant ground on which to complain of stone-throwing by the crowd.

The interpolated *Black Cape* and the *Second Toilette* we may here dismiss as being wholly outside the *Salome* atmosphere. Of the pure *Salome* designs, incomparably the finest are the *Stomach Dance* and *The Peacock Skirt*. Beardsley himself considered the three best drawings to be *The Man in the Moon*, *The Peacock Skirt*, and *The Dancer's Reward*—it should be noted, by the way, that Beardsley showed by his *Book of Fifty Drawings* that his title was *The Man in the Moon*, not as the publishers have it, *The Woman in the Moon*. But it is in *The Climax*, one of the less noteworthy designs, that we most clearly discover Beardsley's forward stride—for though the lower half is so wretchedly done that it scarce seems to be by the same hand as the upper half, the purification of the line as compared with the fussy, fidgety futilities and meaninglessness of his flourishes and "hairy line" in the same subject, and practically of the same design, drawn the year before and shown in *The Studio* first number, makes us realise not only how rapidly he is advancing towards ease and clearness of statement, but it also makes us sympathise with Beardsley's bitter distaste to carrying on a sequence of designs in a craftsmanship which he has outgrown, if indeed it had been possible to him to go back.

Closing the book of *Salome*, weary of the Japanesque convention, having got from it all that it would yield his restless and eager spirit, he turned away, and with his eyes opened to the mastery of the old Greek masters in their vase paintings, he was about to burst into a new song. An artist is finding himself. Beardsley is on the threshold of a new utterance.

About the end of October or early in the November of 1893, Beardsley wrote to his old school that he had just signed a contract for a new book, to consist of his own drawings only, "without any letterpress," which was probably a slight misunderstanding of what Beardsley meant: that he was to make drawings with no relation to the letterpress in a new venture about to appear. For *The Yellow Book* is the only contract that emerges out of this time. We know from Harland that he and Beardsley had been planning and scheming to produce a magazine for themselves which they soon thereafter proposed to John Lane and Elkin Mathews.

Whilst at work on the *Salome*, Beardsley began the long series of decorative covers, with the fanciful "keys" on the reverse back forming the initials of the author of each volume, which Elkin Mathews and John Lane began to issue from The Bodley Head in Vigo Street as "*The Keynote Series*" of novels, published on the heels of the wide success of *Keynotes* by George Egerton in the midst of the feminist stir and the first notoriety of the "sex novel" of this time.

It was in 1893 that he was elected to the New English Art Club.

Beardsley was beginning to feel his feet. His circle amongst artists and art-lovers was rapidly increasing. Suddenly a legacy to the brother and sister from their aunt in Brighton, with whom they had lived after their own family came to London, decided Beardsley and his sister to set up house for themselves and to flit from the parental roof. About the end of the year, or the New Year of 1894, they bought their little home—the house at 114 Cambridge Street in Pimlico.

VII

THE GREEK-VASE PHASE

New Year of 1894 to Mid-1895—Twenty-One to Twenty-Three

The Yellow Book

IT was near the New Year of 1894 that Aubrey Beardsley with his sister Mabel Beardsley moved into his second Pimlico home in London, at 114 Cambridge Street, Warwick Square, which Vallance decorated for him with orange walls and black woodwork, with its much-talked-of black-and-orange studio. How dull and stale it all sounds to-day !

Here Beardsley made his bid for a place in the social life of London. Every Thursday afternoon he and his sister, and generally his mother, were " At Home " to visitors. Beardsley, dressed with scrupulous care to be in the severest good taste and fashion, delighted to play the host—and an excellent host he was. All his charming qualities were seen at their best. The lanky, rather awkward, angular Aubrey, pallid of countenance, stooped and meagre of body, with his " tortoiseshell-coloured hair " worn in a smooth fringe over his white forehead, was the life and soul of his little gatherings. But he paid for it with " a bad night " always when the guests were departed.

Beardsley greatly liked his walls decorated with the stripes running from ceiling to floor in the manner he so much affects for the designs of his interiors, such as the famous drawing of the lady standing at her dressing-table, known as *La Dame aux Camélias*. The couch in his studio bore sad evidence to the fact that he had to spend all too much of his all too short life lying upon it.

When Beardsley began the *Salome* drawings at twenty-one he was, as we have seen, greatly interested in the erotic works of the Japanese masters; and this eroticism dominated his art quite as much as did the craftsmanship of the Japanese in line, whilst the lechery of his faces was distinctly suggested

COVER DESIGN FOR "THE YELLOW BOOK," VOLUME III

by the sombre, the macabre, and the grotesque features so much affected by the Japanese masters. As he worked upon the *Salome* designs he was much at the British Museum, and was intensely drawn to the Greek vase-paintings in which the British Museum is very rich. Now not only did the austere artistry of the Greek use of line and mass fascinate Beardsley—not only was he struck by the rhythm and range of mood, tragic, comic, and satirical, uttered by the Greeks, but here again was that factor in the Greek genius which appealed to Beardsley's intense eroticism. The more sexual of the Greek vase-painters are naturally turned away from the public eye towards the wall; indeed, some of them, 'tis said, have been " purified " by prudish philistinism painting out certain " naughtinesses " ; but it was precisely the skill with which the great Greek painters uttered erotic moods by the rhythmic use of line and mass that most keenly intrigued Beardsley. The violences of horrible lecherous old satyrs upon frail nymphs, painted by such Greek masters as Brygos and Duris, appealed to the morbid and grotesque mind and mood of Beardsley as they had tickled the Greeks aforetime. He has scarce finished his *Salome* drawings under the Japanese erotic influence before the Greek satyr peeps in ; so he straightway flung away the Japanesque, left it behind him, and boldly entered into rivalry with the great Greeks. It was to make him.

On the 15th of April, 1894, appeared *The Yellow Book*, which was to make Beardsley notorious.

In the February of that year *Salome* had been published cheek by jowl with the third, the last, volume of the *Bon Mots*; and the *Morte d'Arthur* was in full career. It is a common fallacy amongst writers to say that *Salome* made Beardsley famous. *Salome* was an expensive book, published in a very limited edition. Except in a small but ever-increasing literary and artistic set, the *Morte d'Arthur* and *Salome* passed unrecognised and unknown. But *Salome* led to an act which was to make Beardsley leap at a bound into the public eye.

Elkin Mathews and John Lane were inspired with the idea of publishing a handsome little quarterly, bound as a book, which should gather together the quite remarkable group of young writers and artists that had arisen in London, akin to and in part largely created by the so-called Decadent group in Paris. This is not the place to describe or pursue the origins and rise of the French Decadents. The idea of *The Yellow Book* developed from a scheme

of Beardsley's, who was rich in schemes and dreams rarely realised or even begun, whereby he was to make a book of drawings without any letterpress whatsoever, of a sort of pictorial Comedy Ballet of Marionettes—to answer in the pictorial realm to Balzac's Prose Comedy of life; but it does not seem to have fired a publisher. *The Yellow Book* quarterly, however, was a very different affair, bringing together, as it did, the scattered art of the younger men. It inevitably drew into its orbit, as Beardsley dreaded it would, self-advertising mediocrities more than one. It was decided to make Harland, with his French literary sympathies, the literary editor, Beardsley to be the art editor. John Lane has borne witness to the fact that one morning Beardsley with Henry Harland and himself, "during half an hour's chat over our cigarettes at the Hogarth Club, founded the much-discussed *Yellow Book*." This quarterly, to be called *The Yellow Book* after the conventional name of a "yellow back" for a French novel, was to be a complete book in itself in each number—not only was it to be rid of the serial or sequence idea of a magazine, but the art and the literature were to have no dependence the one on the other.

Beardsley, feverishly as he had addressed himself to the *Salome*, having made the drawings and wearied of them, began to look for new worlds to conquer. It was about the New Year of 1894, the *Salome* off his hands, that *The Yellow Book* was planned in detail and Beardsley flung himself into the scheme with renewed fiery ardour. The idea suited him better than any yet held out to him for the expression of his individual genius; and his hand's craft was beginning to find personal expression. His mimicries and self-schooling were at an end. He flung the Japanesques of the *Salome* into the waste-paper basket of his career with as fine a sigh of relief as he had aforetime flung aside the *Morte d'Arthur* Kelmscott mediævalism. And he now gave utterance to the life of the day as he saw it—through books—and he created a decorative craftsmanship wherewith to do it, compact of his intensely suggestive nervous and musical line in collusion with flat black masses, just as he saw that the Greeks had done—employing line and mass like treble and bass to each other's fulfilment and enhancement. His apprenticeship to firm line and solid blacks in the *Morte d'Arthur* now served him to splendid purpose. He was taking subjects that would tickle or exasperate the "man in the street," who was cold about the doings of the Court of Herod and indifferent to Japan

and the Knights of the Round Table. Interested in the erotic side of social life, he naturally found his subjects in the half-world—he took the blatant side of "life" as it was lived under the flare of the electric lights of Piccadilly Circus and the cafés thereabouts; its powdered and painted and patchouli "romance" amused him more than the solid and more healthy life of his day into which he had little insight, and for which he had rather a contempt, as judged from his own set, as being "middle-class" and therefore unromantic. But he had the right as artist to utter any emotional experience whatsoever, the erotic as much as anything else—we are coming to that.

It was about this New Year of 1894 that the extraordinary German, Reichardt, who had made a huge success of his humorous and artistic weekly, *Pick-Me-Up*, in rivalry to *Punch*, planned the issue of a monthly magazine which had as its secret aim, if successful, to turn into a weekly illustrated paper to "smash the *Graphic* and *Illustrated London News*." Struck by some flippant article attacking the art critics written by me, he called me to the writing of the weekly review of art matters in this paper, which was to be called *St. Paul's*. Although at this time Beardsley was almost unknown to the general public, I suggested that he should be given an opening for decorative work; and he was at once commissioned to make some drawings, to illustrate the Signs of the Zodiac—remember, *St. Paul's* was to begin as a monthly !—and to illustrate the subject to which each page was to be devoted, such as Music, Art, Books, Fashions, The Drama, and the rest of it. He drew *The Man that holds the Watering Pot* and the *Music*, but the paper did not appear in January—indeed not until March. Beardsley then became bored, and fobbed off the paper with a couple of drawings that were probably meant for Dent's *Bon Mots*, but nevertheless may have been intended for *The Fashions* and *The Drama* pages of *St. Paul's*. He made in all four, which were to be used as headings and tail-pieces. They did not greatly encourage Reichardt, who shrugged his shoulders and said that I "might have the lot." They have never reached me ! They have this value, however, that they reveal Beardsley's craftsmanship at the New Year of 1894—they show him ridding himself of the "hairy line," with a marked increase of power over line—they end his *Salome* Japanesque phase.

It is somewhat curious that, whilst *The Man that holds the Watering Pot* is always printed awry in the collections of Beardsley's works, the fourth

drawing he made for *St. Paul's* seems to have been missed by all the iconographists, and I now probably possess the only known print of it !

Before we leave *St. Paul's*, it is interesting to note that at this time the line and decorative power of Beardsley's work were rivalled by the beauty, quality, richness, and decorative rhythm of the ornamental headings which Edgar Wilson was designing for *St. Paul's* and other papers.

It was in the March of 1894 that Beardsley drew the *Poster for the Avenue Theatre* which really brought him before a London public more than anything he had so far done—a success, be it confessed, more due to the wide interest aroused by the dramatic venture of the Avenue Theatre than to any inherent value in the Poster itself, which could not be compared with the work of the Beggarstaff Brothers. Needless to say that it was at this same time that George Bernard Shaw was to float into the public ken with his play of *Arms and the Man* at this same Avenue Theatre, hitherto so unlucky a play-house that, from its situation on the Embankment under Charing Cross Bridge, it was cynically known to the wags as "The Home for Lost Seagulls." I shall always associate Beardsley's Avenue Theatre poster with Shaw's rise to fame, as it recalls Shaw's first night, when, being called before the curtain at the end of *Arms and the Man*, some man amongst the gods booing loud and long amidst the cheering, Shaw's ready Irish wit brought down the house as, gazing upwards into the darkness, his lank, loose figure waited patiently until complete silence had fallen on the place, when he said dryly in his rich brogue: "I agree with that gentleman in the gallery, but"—shrugging his shoulders—"what are we amongst so many?"

Beardsley's decorations for John Davidson's *Plays* appeared about April; but, needless to say, did not catch the interest of a wide public.

Suddenly his hour struck for Aubrey Beardsley.

It was the publication of *The Yellow Book* in the mid-April of 1894 that at once thrust Beardsley into the public eye and beyond the narrow circle so far interested in him.

London Society was intensely literary and artistic in its interests, or at any rate its pose, in the early 'nineties—I sincerely think really interested. Every lady's drawing-room was sprinkled with the latest books—the well-to-do bought pictures and wrangled over Art. The leaders of Society prided

themselves on their literary and artistic salons. As a snowfall turns London white in a night, so *The Yellow Book* littered the London drawing-rooms with mustard as at the stroke of a magician's wand. It "caught on." And catching on, it carried Aubrey Beardsley on the crest of its wave of notoriety into sudden vogue. After all, everything that was outstanding and remarkable about the book was Beardsley. *The Yellow Book* was soon the talk of the town, and Beardsley "awoke to find himself famous." Punch promptly caricatured his work; and soon he was himself caricatured by "Max" in the *Pall Mall Budget;* whilst the Oxford undergraduates were playing with Wierdsley Daubrey and the like. But it was left to Mostyn Piggott to write perhaps the finest burlesque on any poem in our tongue in the famous skit which ran somewhat thus:

'Twas rollog; and the minim potes
Did mime and mimble in the cafe;
All footly were the Philerotes
And Daycadongs outstrafe. . . .

Beware the Yallerbock, my son!
The aims that rile, the art that racks,
Beware the Aub-Aub Bird, and shun
The stumious Beerbomax!

* * * * *

Then, as veep Virgo's marge he trod,
The Yallerbock, with tongue of blue,
Came piffling through the Headley Bod,
And flippered as it flew. . . .

As one turns over the pages of *The Yellow Book* to-day, it is a little difficult to recall the sensation it made at its birth. Indeed, London's passions and whims, grown stale, are fantastic weeds in the sere and yellow leaf. But it *was* a sensation. And that sensation flung wide the doors of Society to Aubrey Beardsley. He enjoyed his fame with gusto. He revelled in it. And the ineffable conceit that it engendered was very excusable and understandable. He was lionised on every hand. He appeared everywhere and enjoyed every ray of the sun that shone upon him. And the good fortune that his fairy godmother granted to him in all his endeavours was enhanced by an increase of health and strength that promised recovery from the hideous threat that had dogged his sleeping and waking. His musical childhood had taught

him the value of publicity early—the whole of his youth had seen him pursuing it by every means and at every opportunity. When fame came to him he was proud of it and loved to bask in its radiance. At times he questioned it; and sometimes he even felt a little ashamed of it—and of his jackals. But his vogue now took him to the "Domino Room" of the Café Royal as a Somebody—and he gloried in the hectic splendour of not having to be explained.

It was now roses, roses, all the way for Aubrey Beardsley; yet even at the publishing of the second volume of *The Yellow Book* in July there was that which happened—had he had prophetic vision—that boded no good for the exultant youth.

The deed of partnership between Elkin Mathews and John Lane fell in, and Elkin Mathews withdrew from the firm, leaving John Lane in sole possession of The Bodley Head—and *The Yellow Book*.

The parting of Elkin Mathews and John Lane seemed to bring to a head considerable feeling amongst the group of writers collected about The Bodley Head; I never quite understood why; this was to bear bitter fruit for Beardsley before a twelvemonth was out.

It was on the designs of this second volume of *The Yellow Book* of July 1894 that Beardsley signed his "Japanesque mark" for the last time. Indeed these signed designs were probably done before June; for, in the *Invitation Card for the Opening of the Prince's Ladies' Golf Club* on Saturday, June 16th, 1894, the "Japanesque mark" has given place to "Aubrey Beardsley."

Beardsley was to be seen everywhere. People wondered when he did his work. He flitted everywhere, enjoying his every hour, as though he had no need to work—were above work. He liked to pose as one who did not need to work for a livelihood. As each number of the quarterly appeared, he won increase of notoriety—or obloquy, which was much the same thing to Aubrey Beardsley; but as the winter came on he was to have a dose of obloquy of a kind that he did not relish, indeed that scared him—and, as a fact, it was most scandalously unfair gossip. Meanwhile the Christmas number of *To-day* produced his very fine night-piece, *Les Passades*.

Oscar Wilde was at the height of his vogue—as playwright and wit and man of letters. Beardsley's artistic share in the *Salome*, with its erotic atmosphere and its strange spirit of evil, gave the public a false impression that

NIGHT PIECE. FROM "THE YELLOW BOOK," VOLUME I

Beardsley and Wilde were intimates. They never were. Curiously enough, the young fellow was no particular admirer of Wilde's art, whilst Wilde detested Beardsley's work so much that he would never have a drawing by him in his house. Wilde's conceited remark that he had "invented Beardsley" deeply offended the other. To cap it all, Beardsley delighted in the Bohemian atmosphere and the rococo surrounding of what was known as the Domino Room at the Café Royal, and it so happened that Wilde had also elected to make the Café Royal his Court, where young talent was allowed to be brought into the presence and introduced. It came into the crass mind of one of Wilde's satellites to go over to a table at which Beardsley was sitting, revelling in hero-worship, and to lead the sensitive young fellow into the presence, as Wilde had signified his condescension to that end—but the gross patronage of Wilde that followed wounded Beardsley's conceit to the quick. It had flattered Beardsley to be seen with Wilde; but he never became an intimate—he never again sought to bask in the radiance.

To add to Beardsley's discomfort, there fell like a bolt from the blue a novel called *The Green Carnation*, of which Wilde and his associates were the obvious originals. The book left little to the imagination. The Marquis of Queensberry, owing to his son Lord Alfred Douglas's intimacy with Wilde, was only too eager to strike Wilde down. Even if Queensberry had been inclined to hang back he could not very well in common decency have allowed the imputation of the book to pass by him without taking action. But he welcomed the scandal. He sprang at opportunity—and struck hard. With the reckless courage so characteristic of him, Queensberry took serious risks, but he struck—and he knew that the whole sporting world, of which he was a leader, would be behind him, as he knew full well that the whole of the healthy-minded majority of the nation would be solid in support of his vigorous effort to cut the canker out of Society which was threatening public life under Wilde's cynical gospel that the world had arrived at a state of elegant decay.

Queensberry publicly denounced Wilde and committed acts which brought Wilde into widespread disrepute. There was nothing left to Wilde but to bring a charge of criminal libel against him or become a social pariah. On the 2nd of March, 1895, Queensberry was arrested and charged at Marlborough Street; on the 9th he was committed for trial; and on the 3rd of April he was tried at the Old Bailey amidst extraordinary public excite-

ment. He was acquitted on the 5th of April, amidst the wild enthusiasm of the people. Oscar Wilde was arrested the same evening.

On the 6th of April, Wilde, with Taylor, was charged at Bow Street with a loathsome offence; public interest was at fever pitch during the fortnight that followed, when, on the 19th of April, Wilde and Taylor were committed for trial, bail being refused. A week later, on the 26th, the trial of Wilde and Taylor began at the Old Bailey. After a case full of sensations, on the 1st of May the jury disagreed and the prisoners were remanded for a fresh trial, bail being again refused. A week later, on the 7th of May, Wilde was released on bail for £5000; and it was decided to try the two men separately. Taylor was put on trial at the Old Bailey for the second time, alone, on May 20th, and the next day was found "Guilty," sentence being postponed. The following day, the 22nd, the second trial of Wilde began at the Old Bailey, and on the 25th of May he also was found "Guilty," and with Taylor was sentenced to two years' imprisonment with hard labour.

The popular excitement over this trial of Wilde reached fever heat. The fall of Wilde shook Society; and gossip charged many men of mark with like vices. Scandal wagged a reckless tongue. A very general scare set in, which had a healthy effect in many directions; but it also caused a vast timidity in places where blatant effrontery had a short while before been in truculent vogue. . . .

John Lane, now at The Bodley Head alone, had published Volume III of *The Yellow Book* in October 1894 and Volume IV in the January of 1895. Beardsley had made the drawings for the April number, Volume V; the blocks were also made, and a copy or so of the number bound, when, at the beginning of March, Queensberry's arrest shook Society. The public misapprehension about Beardsley being a friend of Oscar Wilde's probably caused some consternation amongst the writers of *The Yellow Book;* but whatever the cause, John Lane, who happened to be in America, was suddenly faced with an ultimatum—it was said that one of his chief poets put the pistol to his head and threatened that without further ado either he or Beardsley must leave *The Yellow Book* at once. Now this cable announced that William Watson was not alone, but had the alliance of Alice Meynell, then at the height of her vogue, with others prominent in this movement. But Pennell, who was an intimate friend of Beardsley's, always vowed that William Watson was a far

from willing actor in the drama, and was forced to it by Mrs. Humphry Ward, a very powerful and outstanding figure in the 'nineties, if somewhat a faded figure to-day. However that may be, into the merits of the storm in the teacup we need not here go. What decided John Lane in his awkward plight to sacrifice Beardsley rather than the poet was a personal matter, solely for John Lane to decide as suited his own business interest best. He decided to jettison Beardsley. The decision could have had little to do with anything objectionable in Beardsley's drawings, for a copy was bound with Beardsley's designs complete, and anything more innocent of offence it would be difficult to imagine. It may therefore be safely assumed that the revolt on John Lane's ship was solely due to the panic set up by the Wilde trial, resulting in a most unjust prejudice against Beardsley as being in some way sympathetic in moral with the abhorred thing. No man knows such gusts of moral cowardice as the moralist. However, in expelling Beardsley *The Yellow Book* was doomed —it at once declined, and though it struggled on, it went to a lingering death.

This ultimatum by cable to John Lane in America was a piece of cant that Lane felt as bitterly as the victim Beardsley. It grieved Lane to his dying day, and he blamed himself for lack of courage in deserting Beardsley ; but he was hustled, and he feared that it might wreck the publishing house which he had built up at such infinite pains. Above all he knew that Beardsley would never forgive him. But Lane blamed himself quite needlessly, as in all else in this ugly incident, in that he had shown lack of dignity in allowing himself to be thrust aside from captaincy of his own ship, whilst he had been made responsible for the act of his mutineers which he had wholeheartedly detested. John Lane would not be comforted—he never ceased to blame himself.

His expulsion from *The Yellow Book* was very bitterly resented by Beardsley. It hurt his pride and it humiliated him at the height of his triumph. And he writhed at the injustice inflicted upon him by the time selected to strike at him, besmirching him as it did with an association of which he was wholly innocent. And it must be confessed that *The Yellow Book* at once became a stale farce played by all concerned, from the leading lady to the scene-shifter, as though *Hamlet* were being attempted without the Prince of Denmark.

The trial and convicting of Oscar Wilde shook Beardsley even more thoroughly. Quite apart from the fierce feeling of resentment at the injustice of his being publicly made to suffer as though an intimate of a man in disgrace for whom he had no particular liking, Beardsley realised that his own flippant and cheaply cynical attitude towards Society might, like Wilde's, have to be paid for at a hideous price. The whole ugly business filled him with disgust; and what at least was to the good, the example of Wilde's crass conceit humbled in the dust knocked much of the cheap conceit out of Beardsley, to his very great advantage, for it allowed freer play to that considerable personal charm that he possessed in no small degree.

His expulsion from *The Yellow Book* placed Beardsley in a very awkward financial position. The income that he derived from his drawings for *The Yellow Book* must have been but small at best; and it is a mystery how he lived. It has been said that he found generous patrons, and that of these not the least generous was one André Raffalovich, a man of wealth. But the sources of his means of livelihood must have been dangerously staunched by his expulsion from *The Yellow Book*.

The strange part of Beardsley's career is that the designs for Volume V of *The Yellow Book*, printed for April, but suppressed at the last moment, ended his achievement in this phase and style and craftsmanship. When the blow fell, he was already embarking upon a new craftsmanship; indeed towards this development he markedly moves in the later *Yellow Book* designs. Had Beardsley died in mid-1895, at twenty-three, he would have left behind him the achievement of an interesting artist; but not a single example of the genius that was about to astonish the world.

The Yellow Book phase of Beardsley's art is very distinct from what went before and what was to come after. There are two types: a fine, firm line employed with flat black masses, of which the famous *Lady Gold's Escort* and *The Wagnerites* are the type, and of which *The Nightpiece* is the triumph—and a very thin, delicate line, generally for portraiture, to define faintly the body to a more firmly drawn head—of which the *Mrs. Patrick Campbell* is the type and *L'Éducation Sentimentale* a variant—whilst the *Scarlet Pastorale* and *The Mysterious Rose Garden* show white masses used against black.

THE MYSTERIOUS ROSE GARDEN.
FROM "THE YELLOW BOOK,"
VOLUME IV

The *Plays of John Davidson*, several *Madame Rejanes*, the fine *Les Passades*, the *Scarlet Pastorale*, and the *Tales* by Edgar Allen Poe are all of the early 1894 *Yellow Book* phase.

But in the third volume of *The Yellow Book*, the fanciful and delightful portrait of *The Artist in Bed*, " Par les dieux jumeaux tous les monstres ne sont pas en Afrique," and the superb *La Dame aux Camélias* standing before her dressing-table, advance his handling in freedom and rhythm; as does the exquisite *The Mysterious Rose Garden*, which Beardsley described as " the first of a series of Biblical illustrations, and represents nothing more nor less than the *Annunciation* "—indeed he could not understand the objections of the prudish to it, and resented its being misunderstood! The *Mesalina with her Companion* is of this later *Yellow Book* phase; and the *Atalanta without the Hound* of the suppressed fifth volume is a fine example.

The beautifully wrought *Pierrot Invitation Card* for John Lane; the remarkable wash drawings *A Nocturne of Chopin* from the suppressed Volume V, and the *Chopin*, *Ballade III Op.* 47 of *The Studio*, all drawn on the eve of his expulsion from *The Yellow Book*, show Beardsley advancing with giant strides when the blow fell; and in the double-page *Juvenal* of the monkey-porters carrying the sedan-chair he foreshadows his new design. But the surest test of the change, as well as the date of that change, is revealed by an incident that followed Beardsley's expulsion from *The Yellow Book*; for, being commissioned to design a frontispiece by Elkin Mathews for *An Evil Motherhood*, Beardsley promptly sent the rejected *Black Cape*, of the suppressed fifth volume, direct to the printers; and it was only under the dogged refusal of Elkin Mathews to produce it that Beardsley made the now famous design of the *Evil Motherhood*, in which he entirely breaks from *The Yellow Book* convention and craftsmanship, and launches into the craftsmanship of his Great Period.

It was about the time of Beardsley's expulsion from *The Yellow Book* that trouble arose in America over the piracy of one of Beardsley's posters for Fisher Unwin, the publisher. Beardsley had made a mediocre poster for " *The Pseudonym Library*," a woman in a street opposite a bookshop; but followed it with the finest poster he ever designed—a lady reading, seated in a " groaning-chair," a scheme in black and purple, for *Christmas Books*—all three of *The Yellow Book* phase.

There happened at this time, soon after his expulsion from *The Yellow Book*, in mid-1895, a rather significant incident in young Beardsley's life—an incident that dragged me into the comedy, and was to have a curious and dramatic sequel before three years were passed by.

I had only as yet met Beardsley once. But it so happened by chance—and it was a regret to me that it so chanced—that it fell to my lot to have to criticise an attack on modern British art in the early summer, and in the doing to wound Beardsley without directly intending it. There is a tendency to forget, in making one's points clear in controversy, that people of whom one writes as public characters are alive and very human. He had asked for it, 'tis true—had clamoured for it—and yet resented others saying what he was arrogant in doing. . . . One of those stupid, narrow-visioned campaigns against modern art that break out with self-sufficient Philistinism, fortified by self-righteousness, amongst academic and conventional writers, like measles in a girls' school, was in full career; and a fatuous and utterly unjust attack, led by Harry Quilter if I remember rightly, leaping at the Oscar Wilde scandal for its happy opportunity, poured out its ridiculous moralities and charges against the whole of modern British art and literature over the pages of one of the great magazines, as though Wilde and Beardsley were England. It will be noted that with crafty skill the name of Beardsley was coupled with that of Wilde—I see the trick of "morality" now; I did not see it at the time. I answered the diatribe in an article entitled *The Decay of English Art*, in the June of 1895, in which it was pointed out that it was ridiculous, as it was vicious, to take Oscar Wilde in literature and Aubrey Beardsley in art as the supreme examples and typical examples of the British genius, when Swinburne and Rudyard Kipling and Shaw, to mention a few authors alone, Sidney Sime and the Beggarstaff brothers and young Frank Brangwyn, to mention two or three artists at random, with Phil May, were in the full tide of their utterance. Indeed, the point dwelt upon was that neither Wilde nor Beardsley, so far from being the supreme national genius, was particularly "national" in his art—that Beardsley, remarkable as was his promise (he had not as yet burst into full song), in so far as he had given forth his art up to that time, was born out of the Æsthetes (Burne-Jones and Morris), who, like the Pre-Raphaelites who bred them (Rossetti), were not national at all, but had aped a foreign tongue, speaking broken English with an Italian accent, and had tried to see life

through borrowed spectacles in frank and vaunted mimicry of mediæval Italian Renaissance vision. In going over Wilde's and Beardsley's claims to represent the British genius, I spoke of the art of both men as "having no manhood" and being "effeminate, sexless and unclean"—which was not at all typical of the modern achievement as a whole, but only of a coterie, if a very brilliantly led coterie.

Beardsley, I afterwards heard, egged on to it by the jackals about him, cudgelled his brains to try to write a withering Whistlerian reply; and, after some days' cudgelling, was vastly pleased with a laboriously hatched inspiration. It was a cherished and carefully nurtured ambition of young fellows to rival Whistler in withering brevities to the Press. He wrote a letter to the editor of *St. Paul's*; and the editor, Reichardt, promptly sent it on to me, asking if I had any objection to its being printed. The letter began clumsily and ungrammatically, but contained at the end a couple of quite smartly witty lines. It ran thus:

114 *Cambridge Street, S.W.*
June 28th.

Sir,

No one more than myself welcomes frank, nay, hostile criticism, or enjoys more thoroughly a personal remark. But your art critic surely goes a little too far in last week's issue of *St. Paul's*, & I may be forgiven if I take up the pen of resentment. He says that I am "sexless and unclean."

As to my uncleanliness I do the best for it in my morning bath, & if he has really any doubts as to my sex, he may come and see me take it.

Yours &c.
Aubrey Beardsley.

This letter was read and shown to Beardsley's circle amidst ecstatic delight and shrill laughter, and at last dated and despatched.

I wrote to Reichardt that of course Beardsley had every right to answer my criticisms, but that I should expect my reply to be published—that I quite understood Beardsley's business astuteness in seeking self-advertisement—but I was the last man in the world to allow any man to make a fool of me in print even to add stature to Beardsley's inches. But I suggested that as

Beardsley seemed rather raw at literary expression, and as I hated to take advantage of a clown before he had lost his milk teeth, I would give him back his sword and first let him polish the rust off it; advised him, if he desired to pose as a literary wit, that he obliterate two mistakes in grammar by cutting out the whole of the clumsy beginning, and simply begin with "Your critic says I am sexless and unclean," and then straight to his naughty but witty last sentence. I begged therewith to forward my reply at the same time, as follows:

A Public Apology to Mr. Aubrey Beardsley.

Sir,

When a cockrel sits overlong upon the egg of the spontaneous repartee, his labour runs risk of betraying the strain to which he has put his untried skill in giving birth to gossamer or bringing forth the airy bladder of the scathing retort. To ape Whistler does not disprove descent from the monkeys. But since Mr. Beardsley displays anxiety to establish his sex, pray assure him that I eagerly accept his personal confession. Nor am I overwhelmed with his rollicking devilry in taking his morning bath—a pretty habit that will soon lose its startling thrill of novelty if he persist in it.

Yours truly,

Hal Dane.

July 3rd, 1895.

Beardsley, on receipt of all this, lost his grin and awoke with a start to the fact that the sword is a dangerous weapon wherewith to carve a way to advertisement—the other fellow may whip from the scabbard as deadly a weapon for wounds.

He seems to have rushed off to Reichardt—before giving out my answer to the jackals who had shrieked over his "masterpiece"—on receipt of my letter and, fearful lest he might be too late, he anxiously pleaded that he might be allowed to withdraw his letter. Reichardt replied that it must depend on me. I then wrote to Reichardt that of course I had suspected that Beardsley's childish assurance that "no one more than himself enjoys more thoroughly a personal remark" was a smile on the wry side of his mouth; but that I ought to confess that it had not been any intention of mine to lash *at him*

personally, but at Harry Quilter—at the same time perhaps he would not take it amiss from me, since I was no prude, that I thought it a pity that Beardsley should fritter his exquisite gifts to the applause of questionable jackals and the hee-haw of parasites, when he should be giving all his powers to a high achievement such as it would be a source of artistic pride for him to look back upon in the years to come. It is only fair to add that from that moment Beardsley trusted me, and that his works as they were about to be published were sent to me in advance for criticism. What is more, in writing to Reichardt about Beardsley, I had strongly urged the young fellow to rid his signature of the wretched "rustic lettering" he affected, and to employ plain block letters as being in keeping with the beauty of his line and design; and to show how free he was from resenting sincere advice, from this time, greatly to the enhancement of his design, Beardsley used plain block lettering for his signature. Reichardt told me that tears came into his eyes when he read out to him a passage in my letter in which I had told him that, at a gathering at Leighton's house, Phil May had asked the President of the Royal Academy whether he thought that Hal Dane had not put it rather extravagantly when he wrote that Beardsley was one of the supreme masters of line who had ever lived; to which Leighton had solemnly replied, before a group that was anything but friendly to Beardsley's work, that he thoroughly agreed. Perhaps I ought to say that I had seen an advance proof of the *Venus between Terminal Gods*, and it had been a revelation to me. Leighton had also seen it. It was a particular gratification to me that this little more than a youth was informed of Leighton's appreciation whilst Leighton lived; for the President, a very great master of line himself, died about the following New Year. Phil May, with precisely the same aim of craftsmanship in economy of line and the use of line to express the containing form in its simplest perfection, whilst he greatly admired the decorative employment of line and mass by Beardsley, considered Beardsley quite incapable of expressing his own age. Phil May was as masterly a draughtsman as Beardsley was a halting draughtsman; but both men could make line "sing."

In a brief three years, Aubrey Beardsley was to lie a-dying; and as he so lay he wrote a letter to his publisher which is its own significant pathetic Amen to this appeal that I made to him before it should be too late, little as one then realised how near the day of bitter regret was at hand.

Beardsley during his early *Yellow Book* phase, about the July of 1894 or a month or so afterwards, made his first essay in painting with oils. He had in June or earlier drawn the three designs for *The Comedy Ballet of Marionettes* which appeared in the July *Yellow Book ;* he now bought canvas and paints and painted *The Comedy Ballet No. I*, in William Nicholson's manner, with slight changes. He evidently tired of the problems of the medium, or he was tired of the picture ; and, turning the canvas about, he painted *A Lady with a Mouse* on the unprimed back between the stretchers in the Walter Sickert style. " I have no great care for colour," he said—" I only use flat tints, and work as if I were colouring a map, the effect aimed at being that produced on a Japanese print. I prefer to draw everything in little."

It is as likely as not that his attempt to paint *The Comedy Ballet No. I* in oil may have had something to do with its use as an advertisement for Geraudel's Pastilles—as well as I can remember—which first appeared in *Le Courier Français* on February 17th, 1895. It was a wonderful decade for the poster, and this French firm offered handsome prizes and prices for a good artistic one ; though, as a matter of fact, Beardsley's posters were quite outclassed by those of far greater men in that realm—Cheret, the Beggarstaff brothers, Steinlen, Lautrec, and others. Beardsley's genius, as he himself knew full well, was essentially " in the small."

For some unfortunate reason, but probably with good-natured intention of preventing Beardsley from suffering discredit at his dismissal from *The Yellow Book*, John Lane whilst in America, during the summer, started a well-meaning but quite fatuous theory much resented by Beardsley, that Beardsley, so far from being the flower of decadence, was " a pitiless satirist who will crush it out of existence. . . . He is the modern Hogarth ; look at his *Lady Gold's Escort* and his *Wagnerites*. . . . The decadent fad can't long stand such satire as that. It has got to go down before it." Scant wonder that the *Daily Chronicle*—probably Pennell—asked dryly, " Now, why was Mr. Lane chaffing that innocent interviewer ? " This apology for his art bitterly offended Beardsley, who knew it to be utterly untrue, but who still more resented this desire to show him as really being " quite respectable." As a matter of fact, Beardsley had nothing of the satirist in him ; had he wanted to satirise anything he would have satirised the respectabilities of the middle class which he detested, not the musicians and the rich whom he

adored and would have excused of any sin. Look through the achievement of Beardsley and try to fling together a dozen designs that could be made to pass for satire of the vices of his age ! It became a sort of cant amongst certain writers to try to whitewash Beardsley by acclaiming him a satirist—he was none. A dying satirist does not try to recall his " obscene drawings."

At a loose end on his expulsion from *The Yellow Book*, Beardsley drifted somewhat. He now turned his attention to a literary career, and began to write an erotic novel which he meditated calling *Venus and Tannhäuser*—it was to emerge later in a much-mutilated state as *Under the Hill*—a sly jest for Under the Venusberg or Mons Veneris. He completely put behind him the Greek vase-painting phase of his drawings for *The Yellow Book*, and developed a new craftsmanship which was to create his great style and supreme achievement in art.

The smallness of the page of *The Yellow Book* had galled him by compelling upon him a very trying reduction of his designs to the size of the plate on the printed page; the reduction had always fretted him; it was become an irk. It compelled him largely to keep to the line and flat back masses of his Greek vase phase longer than his interest was kept alive by that craftsmanship. His developments were uncannily rapid, as though he knew he had but a short way to go.

Baron Verdigris was the transition from the *Morte d'Arthur* phase, to *The Yellow Book* or Greek vase phase; the *Mrs. Whistler as The Fat Woman* the transition from his *Yellow Book* stage; the *Black Coffee* the end of the Greek vase stage. Rid of the cramping limitations of *The Yellow Book* page and its consequent disheartening reduction, Beardsley was about to develop a freer use of his line and reveal a greater love of detail employed with a realistic decorative beauty all his own.

He was still living in his house in Pimlico at 114 Cambridge Street, with his sister, when expelled from *The Yellow Book*. It was about this time that he met the poet John Gray, who had been in the decadent movement and became a Roman Catholic priest—the friendship soon became close and ripened into a warm brotherly affection. It was to have a very important effect on Beardsley's life. Gray published Beardsley's letters, which begin with their early acquaintance, and were soon frequent and regular; these

letters give us an intimate insight into Beardsley's spiritual life and development from this time. Beardsley begins by calling him affectionately "My dear Mentor," from which and from the letters we soon realise that Gray was from the first bent on turning Beardsley's thoughts and tastes and artistic temperament towards entering the Roman Catholic Church. Indeed, soon we find Gray priming the young fellow with arguments to refute his "Anglican" friends.

The bout of renewed health that had come to cheer Beardsley with *The Yellow Book* lasted only to the fall of the yellow leaf. Ill-health began again to dog his footsteps; and it was a tribute to his innate vitality that he could keep so smiling a face upon it.

Whether the little house in Pimlico were sold over his head, or whether from disheartenment of ill-health, or his expulsion from *The Yellow Book* and all that it implied, in the July of 1895 the house at 114 Cambridge Street was sold, and Beardsley removed to 10 and 11 St. James's Place, S.W. It was all rather suddenly decided upon.

He was by this time not only drifting back to bad health, but was so ill that those who saw him took him for a dying man.

The Yellow Book went on without him, to die a lingering death and be buried in the commonplace.

Drifting, rudderless; the certainty of a living wage from The Bodley Head gone wholly from him; hounded again by the fell disease that shook his frail body, Beardsley's wonderful creative force drove him to the making of a drawing which was shown to me in this summer of 1895—and I awoke to the fact and proclaimed it that a creative genius of the first rank in his realm had found himself and was about to give forth an original art of astounding power. It was the proof of the *Venus between Terminal Gods*. A little while later was to be seen the exquisite *Mirror of Love*, wrought just before the *Venus between Terminal Gods*. A new era had dawned for Aubrey Beardsley amidst the black gloom of his bitter sufferings and as bitter humiliation.

THE SAVOY
AUBREY
BEARDSLEY.
1896.

VIII

THE GREAT PERIOD

"*The Savoy*" and the Aquatintesques

Mid-1895 to the Yuletide of 1896—Twenty-Three to Twenty-Four

I. "*The Savoy*"

IT was in a state of drift, of uncertainty as to the future and even the present, that Aubrey Beardsley, after a year of brilliant good fortune, thus suddenly found himself rudderless and at sea. That fickle and heartless arty public that fawned upon him and fought for his smile, that prided itself on "discovering" him and approving his art, these were the last folk in the world to trouble their heads or put hand in pocket in order that he might live and be free to achieve his art. The greater public was inimical and little likely to show sympathy, far less to help.

But even as he drifted, uncertain whether to pursue his art or to venture into literature instead, there stepped out of the void a man who was to make Beardsley's path straight and his wayfaring easy. For, at the very moment of his perplexities, on his twenty-third birthday, Aubrey Beardsley was on the eve of his supreme achievement.

In the summer of 1895, Arthur Symons, the poet and essayist, sought out Beardsley in his London rooms on a mission from as strange a man as could have entered even into his fantastic destiny—a man who proposed to found a new magazine, with Arthur Symons as literary editor and Beardsley as art editor. The mere choice of editors revealed this man's consummate *flair*. His name was Leonard Smithers; and it was to this dandified adventurer that Beardsley was wholly to owe the great opportunity of his life to achieve his supreme master-work. Had it not been for Smithers it is absolutely certain that Aubrey Beardsley would have died with the full song that was within him unsung.

Arthur Symons has told us of his mission and of his finding Beardsley lying on a couch—"horribly white; I wondered if I had come too late." Beardsley was supposed to be dying. But the idea of this rival to *The Yellow Book*, which had at once begun to feel the cold draught of the fickle public's neglect on the departure of Beardsley, appealed hugely to the afflicted man, and he was soon eagerly planning the scheme for its construction with Arthur Symons. No more ideal partner for Beardsley in the new venture could have been found than Arthur Symons. A thoroughly loyal man, a man of fine fibre in letters, he had far more than the ordinary cultured literary man's feeling for pictorial art. The two men had also a common bond in their contempt of Mrs. Grundy and in their keen interest in the erotic emotions.

Beardsley there and then suggested the happy name of *The Savoy* for the magazine; and he quickly won over Symons to the idea, so vital to Beardsley's work, of making the page a quarto size in order to enable his work to be produced on a larger scale.

The scheme brought back energy and enthusiasm to Beardsley, and he was soon feverishly at work to surpass all his former achievement. What was perhaps of far more value to Beardsley in the pursuit of his art, even than the new outlet to a large public, was the offer of his publisher, Smithers, to finance him in return for all work whatsoever from his hands becoming thenceforth the sole copyright of Smithers. This exclusive contract with Smithers we are about to see working to Beardsley's great advantage and peace of mind. It made him a free man.

The exclusive right to all Beardsley's drawings from this time gives us a clue to the fact that between Beardsley's expulsion from *The Yellow Book* in the April of 1895 to the beginning of his work for Smithers he in his state of drift created, amongst other things, two drawings of rare distinction, masterpieces which at once thrust him into the foremost rank of creative artists of his age—these drawings, clearly of mid-1895, since they did not belong to John Lane on the one hand, nor to Smithers on the other, were the masterly *Venus between Terminal Gods*, designed for his novel of *Venus and Tannhäuser*, better known as *Under the Hill*, and the exquisite *Mirror of Love*, or, as it was also called, *Love Enshrined in a Heart in the Shape of a Mirror*. In both drawings Beardsley breaks away from his past and utters a clear song, rid of all mimicry whatsoever. His hand's skill is now absolutely the servant of his art's desire.

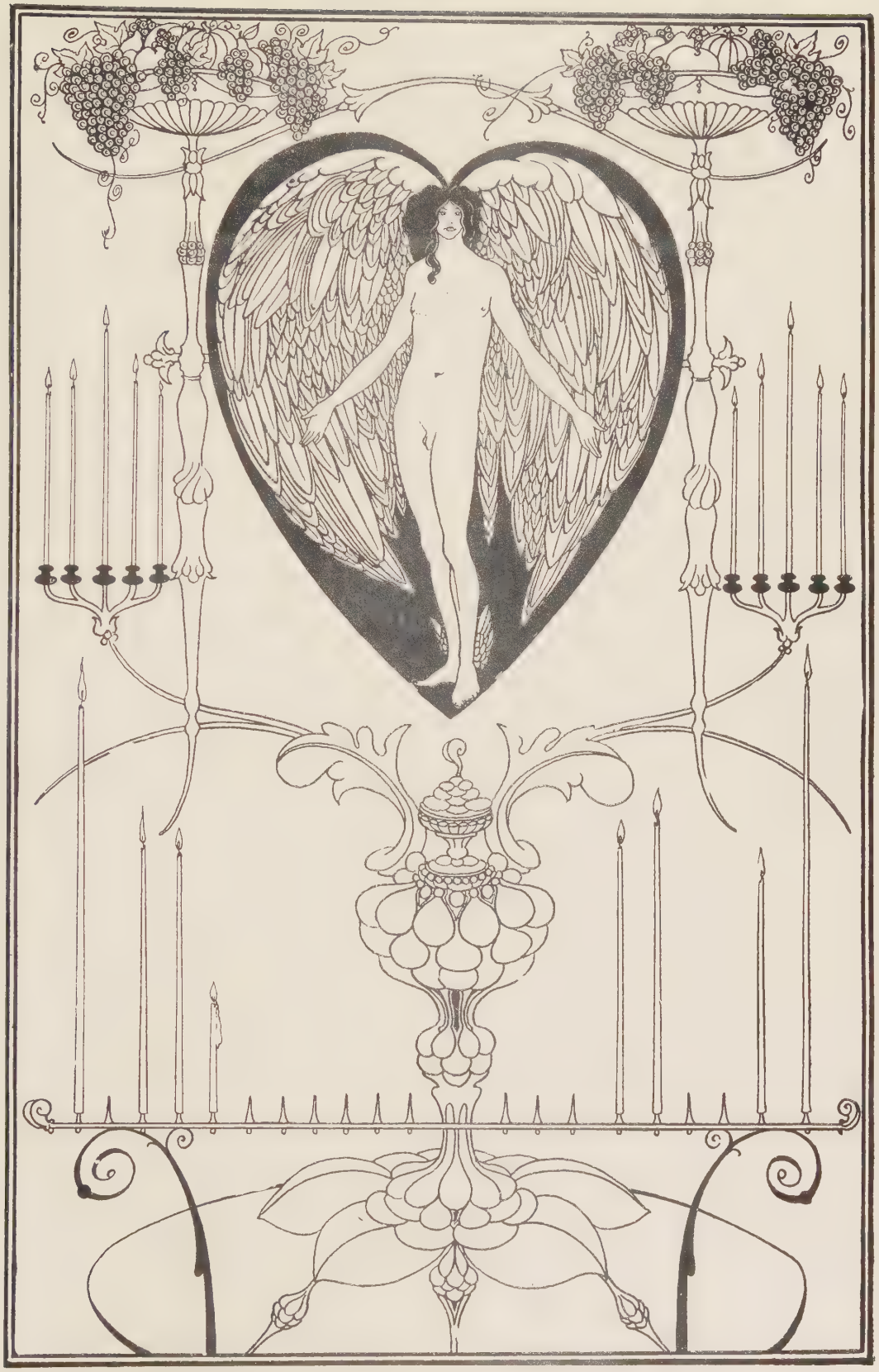
VENUS BETWEEN TERMINAL GODS
(FRONTISPIECE FOR VENUS AND TANNHAUSER).

He plays with the different instruments of the pen line just as skilled musicians draw exquisite harmonies from violins and the deeper notes of the 'cello. His work is like the orchestration of stringed music. His mastery of arrangement and rhythm creates an orchestration, unhesitating, pure, and of haunting melody. These two masterpieces affect the sense of vision as the minuet and gavotte of the seventeen-hundreds affect the sense of sound. Beardsley steps into his kingdom.

The man who opened the gates to Beardsley's supreme genius was a fantastical usher to immortality. Leonard Smithers was a mysterious figure about whom myths early began to take shape. He was reputed to be an "unfrocked" attorney from Leeds. Whether an attorney from the north, frocked or unfrocked, or if unfrocked, for what unfrocked, gossip whispered and pursed the lip—but gave no clue. He came to London to adventure into books with a rare *flair* for literature and for art. We have but a tangle of gossip from which to write the life of such a man. The tale went as to how he came to London and set up as a second-hand bookseller in a little slip of a shop, its narrow shelves sparsely sprinkled with a few second-hand books of questionable morality. A glass door, with a drab muslin peep-blind at the end, led into a narrow den, from the dingy recess of which his lean and pale and unhealthy young henchman came forth to barter with such rare customers as wandered into the shop. We are told how, one evening, there drifted into the shop a vague man with a complete set of Dickens in the original paper covers; and of how Smithers, after due depreciation of the treasure, bought it for a few sovereigns; and how—whilst the henchman held the absent-minded seller in converse—Smithers slipped out and resold it for several hundred pounds—and that the books being bought and the vague-witted seller departed, the shutters were hastily put up for the night; and Smithers, locking the muslin-curtained door, emptied out the glittering sovereigns upon the table before his henchman's astonished eyes, and of how he and the pallid youth bathed their hair in the showers of gold. . . . Smithers soon thereafter made his daring *coup* with Burton's unexpurgated *Arabian Nights*, which was to be the foundation of his fortune. The gossip ran that, choosing Friday afternoon, so that a cheque written by him could not reach a London bank before the morning of Monday, Smithers ran down to the country to see Lady Burton; and after much persuasion, and making it clear to her that the huge industry and

scholarship of the work would otherwise be utterly wasted, as it was quite unsaleable to an ordinary publisher, but would have to be privately issued, he induced her to sell Burton's scrip for a couple of thousand pounds. Skilfully delaying the writing of the cheque for a sum which his account at the bank could not possibly meet, Smithers waited until it was impossible for the local post to reach London before the banks closed on Saturday morning—returned to town with the scrip—and spent the rest of the evening and the whole of Saturday in a vain and ever-increasing frantic endeavour to sell the famous manuscript for some seven or eight thousand pounds or so. It was only by dogged endeavour on the Sunday that he at last ran down his forlorn hope and sold it for—it is gossiped—some five thousand pounds. On the Monday morning the bank porter, on opening the doors of the bank, found sitting on the doorstep a dandified figure of a man in silk hat and frock coat, with a monocle in his anxious, whimsical eye. . . . So Smithers paid the money into his account to meet the cheque which he had drawn and dated for this Monday, before the manager was likely to have opened his morning correspondence. It had been touch and go.

Smithers next ventured into the lucrative but dangerous field of fine editions of forbidden or questionable books of eroticism. Thus it came about that when John Lane sent Beardsley adrift into space, Smithers, with astute judgment, seized upon the vogue that Lane had cast from him, and straightway decided to launch a rival quarterly wherewith to usurp *The Yellow Book*. He knew that Beardsley, bitterly humiliated, would leap at the opportunity. And with his remarkable *flair* for literature and art, Smithers brought Arthur Symons and Aubrey Beardsley into his venture. Leonard Smithers did more—or at any rate so I had it from himself later, though Smithers was not above an "exaggeration" to his own advantage—Beardsley's bank-books alone can verify or refute it—he intended, meant to see to it, that Beardsley from that hour should be a free man, free from cares of bread, free from suppressing his genius to suit the market-place, free to utter what song was in him. Whether Smithers were the unscrupulous rogue that he was painted by many or not, he determined that from thenceforth Beardsley should be assured of a sound income, whether he, Smithers, had to beg, borrow, or steal, or jockey others, in order that Beardsley should have it. This dissipated-looking man, in whatsoever way he won his means, was at this time always well dressed and had every



THE MIRROR OF LOVE

appearance of being well-to-do. He had his ups and downs; but he made a show of wealth and success. And he kept his wilful bond in his wilful way. Whosoever went a-begging for it, Smithers raised the money by fair means or foul that Beardsley might fulfil himself, for good or for ill. He knew no scruple that stood in Beardsley's way. It is true that when Beardsley died Smithers exploited him; but whilst Beardsley lived, Smithers was the most loyal and devoted friend he had.

A word-portrait of this man, drawn in the pages of a weekly paper, *M.A.P.*, a couple of years after Beardsley's death, shows him as he appeared to the public of his day. Smithers had left the Royal Arcade and blossomed out into offices in King Street, Covent Garden; as town house a large mansion near the British Museum; and a "place in the country": "A publisher of books, although he is generally a subject of veneration, is not often possessed of a picturesque and interesting personality. Mr. Leonard Smithers is a notable exception to the unromantic rule. Few people who know him have failed to come under the spell of his wit and charm. In King Street, Covent Garden, Mr. Smithers has his office, and receives his guests in a great room painted green, and full of quietness and comfortable chairs. Upon the walls are many wonderful originals of pictures by the late Aubrey Beardsley, who was one of Mr. Smithers's greatest friends during his brief but brilliant career. Mr. Smithers is of about medium height and very strongly built. He is clean-shaven, wears a single eye-glass, and has singularly clear-cut, aristocratic features. A man who would be noticed in a crowd, he owes much of his success to his curious power of attracting people and holding their attention. He lives in a great palace of a house in Bedford Square. It was once the Spanish Embassy and is full of beautiful and costly things. . . . At his country house at Walton-on-Naze. . . ."

You see, an extravagant fellow, living in the grand style, the world his footstool—no expense spared; but the source of income a prodigious surmise. Not above being sued in the law courts, nevertheless, for ridiculously small, even paltry, debts. A man of mystery. Such was Leonard Smithers; such the man who stepped into Aubrey Beardsley's life on the eve of his twenty-third year, and lifted him out of the humiliation that had been put upon him. Well might Beardsley write: "A good friend as well as a publisher."

Smithers unlatched the gate of another garden to Beardsley; the which was to be a sad pity. Amongst this man's activities was a dangerous one of issuing private editions of works not fit for the general public. There are certain works of enormous value which can only thus be published. But it was owing to the licence thus given to Beardsley to exercise to the full the erotic taint in him that he was encouraged to give rein to his laboured literary indecency, the novel entitled in its bowdlerised form *Under the Hill*, and later to illustrations which are amongst the finest achievement of his rare craftsmanship, but, except for one drawing, hopelessly unfit for publication.

Disgusted with *The Yellow Book*, Beardsley put his immediate past and influences behind him for ever, and went straight back to his beloved master Watteau, the one master who inspired all his highest achievement. His meeting Conder in the autumn greatly accelerated this return to the master of both. And with the brighter prospect now opening out before him, vigour came back to him, and the autumn and the early winter saw him wonderfully free from the terror that had come back to dog his steps.

Having hurriedly sold the house at 114 Cambridge Street and removed to 10 and 11 St. James's Place, S.W., in the July of 1895, Beardsley in the late summer and early autumn was at Dieppe. Eased now from money cares by his contract with Smithers, and with *The Savoy* due to appear in December, he was back to his early inspiration from the eighteenth century, and his art burst into full song.

Arthur Symons was at Dieppe during the autumn, and there found Beardsley immersed in his work for *The Savoy*: but now more concerned with literary aspirations than with drawing. He was hard at work upon his obscene novel *Venus and Tannhäuser*, the so-called *Under the Hill*, and was keenly interested in verse, carrying the inevitable portfolio about with him under his arm wherever he went and scribbling phrases as they came to him.

This black portfolio carried under his arm led to the waggery of a City wit, that whilst Beardsley had turned his back upon the City, he could not shake off the habits and atmosphere of the insurance clerk, for he always entered a room cautiously, as if expecting to be kicked violently from behind, and looked as if he had "called in on behalf of the Prudential."

It is the fashion amongst the gushing to assert of Beardsley that "if his

master genius had been turned seriously towards the world of letters, his success would have been as undoubted there as it was in the world of arts." It is true that Beardsley by his rare essays into literature proved a sensitive ear for literary colour in words of an artificial type; but his every literary effort proved his barrenness in creative literary gifts. His literary efforts were just precisely what the undergraduate, let loose upon London town, mistakes for literature, as university magazines painfully prove. He had just precisely those gifts that slay art in literature and set up a dreary painted sepulchre in its stead. He could turn out an extraordinary mimicry of a dandified stylist of bygone days; and the very skill in this intensely laboured exercise proved his uncreativeness in literature. He had a marvellous sense of lilt in verse that was strangely denied to him in prose. It is precisely the cheap sort of precious stuff that imposes on superficial minds—the sort of barren brilliance that is the bewildering product, not only of the universities, but that is affected also in cultured City and scholastic circles.

Under the Hill was published in mutilated form in the coming *Savoy*, and afterwards in book form; and as such it baffles the wits to understand how it could have found a publisher, and how Arthur Symons could have permitted this futile mutilated thing—if indeed he had any say in it, which is unthinkable. It is fantastic drivel, without cohesion, without sense, devoid of art as of meaning —a sheer laboured stupidity, revealing nothing—a posset, a poultice of affectations. The real book, of which all this is the bowdlerised inanity, is another matter; but it was so obscene, it revealed the young fellow revelling in an orgy of eroticism so unbridled, that it was impossible to publish it except in the privately printed ventures of Smithers's underground press. But the real book is at least a significance. It gives us the real Beardsley in a self-confession such as explains much that would be otherwise baffling in his art. It is a frank emotional endeavour to utter the sexual ecstasies of a mind that dwells in a constant state of erotic excitement. To that extent at least it is art. Cut that only value out of it—a real revelation of life—and it yields us nothing but a nasty futility. But even the real book reveals a struggle with an instrument of expression for which Beardsley's gifts were quite as inadequate as they were inadequate in the employment of colour to express emotion—even though in halting fashion it does reveal the real unbridled Beardsley, naked and unashamed. It is literature, at any rate, compared with the fatuous ghost of it

that was published to the world at large, the difference between a live man and a man of straw.

As a literary effort the " novel " is interesting rather in revealing Beardsley's shortcomings than his promise. The occasionally happy images are artistic pictorially rather than literary—better uttered pictorially than by words. Beardsley had the tuneless ear for literature that permits a man to write the hideous phrase " a historical essay." In one so censorious as Beardsley in matters of letters and art it is strange to find him reeking with the ugly illiteracy of using words in prose that can only be employed in verse. There is a pedantic use of words which shows in Beardsley that innate vulgarity of mind and taste which seems to think that it speaks better English when it says that there is " an increased humidity in the atmosphere " than to say " it is raining." It is akin to the journalistic use of the word " riparian," which sounds like a tooth-wash, for the beautiful word " riverside." We find in his prose " argent lakes," " reticent waters," " ombre gateways," " taper-time," " around its marge," and such-like elaborate affectations of phrasing, going cheek by jowl with the crude housemaidish vulgarisms of " the subtlest fish that ever were," " anyhow, it was a wonderful lake "—what Tree used wittily to call " refaned " English and housemaid's English jostling each other at a sort of literary remnant sale. Side by side with this pedantic phrasing, with the illiteracy of employing verse phrases in prose, and with the housemaid's use of English, goes, in an attempt to be " saucy," a crude vulgarity of cheap commonplaces such as : " The children cried out, I can tell you " ; " Ah, the rorty little things ! " " The birds . . . kept up ajargoning and refraining " ; " Commanded the most delicious view " ; " It was a sweet little place " ; " Card-tables with quite the daintiest and most elegant chairs " ; " The sort of thing that fairly makes one melt " ; " Said the fat old thing " ; " Tannhäuser's scrumptious torso " ; " A dear little coat " ; " A sweet white muslin frock " ; " Quite the prettiest that ever was " ; and the rest of it. It is only when Beardsley lets himself go on the wings of erotic fancies and the sexual emotions that seem to have been the constant if exquisite torment of his being that he approaches a literary achievement ; and unfortunately it is precisely in these moods that publication is impossible.

This inability to create literature in a mind so skilful to translate or mimic the literature of the dead is very remarkable ; but when we read a collection of

Beardsley's letters it is soon clear that he had been denied artistic literary gifts; for the mind shows commonplace, unintellectual, innocent of spontaneous wit of phrase or the colour of words. It is almost incredible that the same hand that achieved Beardsley's master-work in pen line could have been the same that shows so dullard in his letters to his friend John Gray. In them he reveals no slightest interest in the humanities, in the great questions that vexed the age—he is concerned solely with his health or some business of his trade, or railway journeys or what not. His very religious conversion shows him commonplace and childish. Of any great spiritual upheaval, of any vast vision into the immensities, of any pity for his struggling fellows, of any search for the stars, not a sign !

It is to the eternal credit of Arthur Symons as friend and critic that he did not encourage Beardsley in his literary aspirations, but turned him resolutely back to the true activity of his genius. It is in splendid contrast with a futile publication of Beardsley's " Table-Talk " that others published. It is in that sparse feast of his thin table-talk that is preserved, unfortunately for Beardsley's credit as an artist, his futile remark that " Turner is only a rhetorician in paint." Beardsley had no qualifications whatsoever whereby to judge the majestic and immense genius of Turner. Beardsley had but a very limited sense of colour. The stupendous gifts of orchestration in colour granted to Turner meant nothing to such as Beardsley, who was not fitted to undo the latchets of his shoes. Beardsley thought by his cheap gibe that he belittled Turner, but he only revealed his own lack of stature.

In *Under the Hill* Beardsley reveals his inability to see even art except through French spectacles. He cannot grasp the German soul, so he had to make Tannhäuser into an Abbé—it sounded more real to him. The book is a revelation and confession of the soul of the real Beardsley—of a hard, unlovely egoism even in his love-throes, without one noble or generous passion, incapable of a thought for his fellows, incapable of postulating a sacrifice, far less of making one, bent only on satisfying every lust in a dandified way that casts but a handsome garment over the basest and most filthy licence. It contains gloatings over acts so bestial that it staggers one to think of so refined a taste as Beardsley's, judged by the exquisiteness of his line, not being nauseated by his own impulses. It is Beardsley's testament—it explains his art, his life, his vision—and it proves the cant of all who try to excuse Beardsley as a satirist.

A satirist does not gloat over evil, he lashes it. Beardsley revelled in it. Nay, he utterly despised as being vulgar and commonplace all such as did not revel in it.

The story of *Venus and Tannhäuser*, bowdlerised as *Under the Hill*—by which Beardsley slyly means what he calls "the Venusberg," for even Beardsley feared to *write* "the Mons Veneris"—the story bowdlerised was without consequence, without cohesion, without unity: it was the laboured stringing together of little phrases, word-pictures of moods, generally obscene moods and desires such as come to plague a certain type of consumptive whose life burns at fever heat in the troubled blood. We know from Arthur Symons that Beardsley was for ever jotting down passages, epithets, newly-coined words in pencil at odd moments during this month at Dieppe. He gives us a picture of Beardsley, restless, unable to work except in London, never in the least appealed to by Nature. Beardsley never walked abroad; Symons never saw him look at the sea. When the night fell, Beardsley came out and haunted the casino, gazing at the life that passed. He loved to sit in the large, deserted rooms when no one was there—to flit awhile into the room where the children danced. The sound of music ever drew him to the concerts. He always carries the portfolio with him and is for ever jotting down notes. He writes in a little writing-room for visitors. He agonises over a phrase. He pieces the over-polished sentences and phrases together like a puzzle, making them fit where best they can. He bends all his wits to try to write verse. He hammers out the eight stanzas of *The Three Musicians* with infinite travail on the grassy ramparts of the old castle, and by dogged toil he brings forth the dainty indecencies, as later he chiselled and polished and chiselled the translation from Catullus. The innate musical sense of the man gives the verse rhythm and colour. But Beardsley failed, and was bound to fail, in literature, whether in verse or prose, because he failed to understand the basic significance of art. He failed because he tried to make literature an intellectual act of mimicry instead of a creative emotional act—he failed, as all poetasters fail, because all academism is a negation of art, because he mistook craftsmanship as the end of art instead of the instrument for emotional revelation. As Symons puts it, "It was a thing done to order"—in other words, it was not the child of the vital impulse of all art whatsoever; he could not or did not create a make-believe whereby to transmit his emotions to his fellows, for he was more con-

cerned with trying to believe in his make-believe itself. It was not the child of emotional utterance, like his drawings—it was a deliberately intellectual act done in a polished form. We feel the aping of Wilde, of Whistler, of the old aphorists, like Pope, of the eighteenth-century Frenchman. He uses his native tongue as if it were obsolete, a dead language—he is more concerned with dead words than with live. He tries to create a world of the imagination ; but he cannot make it alive even for himself—he cannot fulfil a character in it or raise a single entity into life out of a fantastic Wardour Street of fine clothes—there is no body, far less soul, in the clothes. He is not greatly concerned with bringing people to life ; he is wholly concerned with being thought a clever fellow with words. He is in this akin to Oscar Wilde. In short, he is a hopeless decadent in art—but, like more than one decadent before him, he was a great artist, which Oscar Wilde was not.

It was whilst at Dieppe that the famous French painter Jacques Blanche made a fine portrait of Beardsley ; and in his hospitable friend's studio it was that Beardsley set up the canvas for the picture he was always going to paint but never did. And it was to Beardsley's infinite delight that Symons took him to Puy to see the author of one of Beardsley's chief literary loves, *La Dame aux Camélias*—Alexandre Dumas, fils.

Charles Conder also painted a rather indifferent portrait of Beardsley in oils which seems to have vanished. But the best portraits of Beardsley the man are word-portraits by Arthur Symons and by Max Beerbohm and two photographs by Frederick Evans.

Symons speaks of Beardsley at this time as imagining himself to be " unable to draw anywhere but in England." This was not necessarily an affectation of Beardsley's, as Symons seems to think ; it is painfully common to the artistic temperament, which often cannot work at all except in the atmosphere of its workshop.

He was now working keenly at *The Savoy* drawings and the illustrations for his bowdlerised *Under the Hill*, to be produced serially in that magazine. The first number was due to appear in December 1895, and the cover-design in black on the pink paper of the boards showed, in somewhat indelicate fashion, Beardsley's contempt for *The Yellow Book* ; but the contempt had to be suppressed and a second edition of the cover printed instead. Though the

prospectus for *The Savoy*, being done late in the autumn of 1895, announced the first number for December, *The Savoy* eventually had to be put off until the New Year; meantime, about the Yuletide of 1895, Beardsley commenced work upon the famous sequence of masterpieces for *The Rape of the Lock*, announced for publication in February, which was being sold in March.

In January 1896 *The Savoy* appeared, and made a sensation in the art world only to be compared with the public sensation of *The Yellow Book*. It was a revelation of genius. It thrust Beardsley forward with a prodigious stride. The fine cover design, the exquisite beauty of the superb title-page—the two black-masked figures in white before a dressing-table—the deft, witty verses of the naughty *Three Musicians*, the *Bathers on Dieppe Beach*, the three sumptuously rich designs of *The Abbé*, the *Toilet of Helen*, and *The Fruit-Bearers* for the novel *Under the Hill*, which began in this number, capped by the stately *Christmas Card* of the Madonna and Child, lifted the new magazine into the rank of the books of the year.

The great French engravers of the eighteenth century, St. Aubin and the rest, with the high achievement of the illustrators of the 'sixties which Gleeson White constantly kept before Beardsley's eyes, had guided him to a craftsmanship of such musical intensity that he had evolved from it all, 'prenticed to it by the facility acquired from his *Morte d'Arthur* experience, an art that was pure music. It was a revelation even to us who were well versed in Beardsley's achievement. And the artistic and literary society of London had scarce recovered breath from its astonishment when, about the end of February, there appeared the masterpieces of Beardsley's illustrations to *The Rape of the Lock*—masterpieces of design and of mood that firmly established Beardsley in the first rank, from the beautiful cover to the cul-de-lampe, *The New Star*—with the sumptuous and epoch-making drawings of *The Dream*, the exquisite *Billet-Doux*, the *Toilet*, the *Baron's Prayer*, and the magnificent *Rape of the Lock* and *Battle of the Beaux and Belles*.

The advance in art is prodigious. We now find Beardsley, as he returned to the influences which were his true inspiration, coming nearer to nature, employing line in an extraordinarily skilful way to represent material surfaces —we find silks and satins, brocades and furs, ormolu and wood, stone and metal, each being uttered into our senses by line absolutely attuned to and interpretive of their surface and fibre and quality. We find a freedom of arrangement and

THE RAPE OF THE LOCK

a largeness of composition that increase his design as an orchestra is greater than its individual instruments. In the two drawings of *The Rape of the Lock* and *The Battle of the Beaux and Belles* it is interesting to note with what consummate skill the white flesh of the beauties is suggested by the sheer wizardry of the single enveloping line, with what skill of dotted line he expresses the muslins and gossamer fabrics; with what unerring power the silks and satins and brocades are rendered, all as distinctly rendered materially as the hair of the perukes; but above all and dominating all is the cohesion and oneness of the orchestration in expressing the impression of the thing seen.

By grim destiny it was so ordained that this triumph of Beardsley's life should come to him in bitter anguish. He was in Brussels in the February of 1896 when he had a bad breakdown. It came as a hideous scare to him. He lay seriously ill at Brussels for some considerable time. Returning to England in May, he was thenceforth to start upon that desperate flitting from the close pursuit by death that only ended in the grave. He determined to get the best opinion in London on his state—he was about to learn the verdict.

The second number of *The Savoy* appeared in April, as a quarterly, and its charming cover-design of *Choosing the New Hat* screened a sad falling off in the output of the stricken man—for the number contained but the *Footnote*, a portrait of himself; the *Third Tableau of "Das Rheingold,"* which he had probably already done before going to Brussels; a scene from *The Rape of the Lock*; and but one illustration to *Under the Hill*, the *Ecstacy of Saint Rose of Lima*; whilst the beautiful title-page of No. 1 had to do duty again for No. 2—in all but four drawings!

Beardsley struggled through May with a *Cover* for the next, the third number of *The Savoy*, to appear in July, *The Driving of Cupid from the Garden*, and worked upon the poem of the *Ballad of a Barber*, making the wonderful line-drawing for it called *The Coiffing*, with a *silhouette cul-de-lampe* of *Cupid with the Gallows*; but his body was rapidly breaking down.

On the 5th of June he was at 17 Campden Grove, Kensington, writing the letter which announces the news that was his death warrant, in which Dr. Symes Thompson pronounced very unfavourably on his condition this day, and ordered absolute quiet and if possible immediate change, wringing from the afflicted man the anguished cry: "I am beginning to be really depressed and frightened

about myself." From this dread he was henceforth destined never to be wholly free. It was to stand within the shadows of his room wheresoever he went. He was about to start upon that flight to escape from it that was to be the rest of his wayfaring : but he no sooner flits to a new place than he sees it taking stealthy possession of the shadows almost within reach of his hand. It is now become for Beardsley a question of how long he can flit from the Reaper, or by what calculated stratagem he can keep him from his side if but for a little while. . . . In this June of 1896 was written that " *Note* " for the July *Savoy*, No. 3, announcing the end of *Under the Hill*—Beardsley has made his first surrender.

So in mid-1896, on the edge of twenty-four, Beardsley began his last restless journey, flitting from place to place to rid himself of the terror. It was not the least bitter part of this wayfaring that he had to turn his back on London town. It has always been one of the fatuous falsities of a certain group of Beardsley's apologists to write as if London had ignored him, and to infer that he owed his recognition to alien peoples—it was London that found him, London that raised him to a dizzy eminence, perhaps even beyond his stature in art, as Beardsley himself feared ; and, to Beardsley, London was the hub of the world. It was the London of electric-lit streets in which flaunted brazenly the bedizened and besmirched women and men, painted and white-washed or elaborately overdressed for the hectic part they played in the tangle of living, if you will ; but it was the London that Beardsley loved above all the world. And whilst Beardsley had had to sell his home in London, he carried his spiritual home with him—clung to a few beloved pieces of Chippendale furniture and to his books and the inspiration of his genius—the engravings after Watteau, Lancret, Peter, Prud'hon, and the like ; above all he clung to the two old Empire ormolu candlesticks without which he was never happy at his work.

By the 6th of July he had moved to the Spreadeagle Hotel at Epsom, where he set to work on illustrating *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* for a Christmas book—for which presumably was the fine *Ali Baba in the Wood*. But, sadly enough, the poor, stricken man is now fretted by his " entire inability to walk or exert himself in the least." Suddenly he bends all his powers on illustrating *Lysistrata !* and in this July of 1896, broken by disease, he pours out such blithe and masterly drawings for the *Lysistrata* as would have made

any man's reputation—but, alas! master-work so obscene that except for the *Athenian Woman in Distress* they could only be printed privately. However, the attacks of hæmorrhage from the lungs were now very severe, and the poor fellow had to prepare for another move—it is astounding that, with death staring him in the face, and with his tormented body torn with disease, Beardsley could have brought forth the gay, lyrical drawings wrought with such consummate skill that unfortunately the world at large can never look upon—the *Lysistrata*. It is almost unthinkable that Beardsley's mind could have allowed his exquisite art to content itself with the frank obscenity which he knew, when he drew these wonderful designs, must render them utterly impossible for publication—that he should have deliberately sacrificed so much to the naughtinesses. Yet as art they are of a high order—they utter the emotions of unbridled sexuality in unforgettable fashion—their very mastery renders them the more impossible to publish. He himself knew full well that the work was master-work—"I have just completed a set of illustrations to *Lysistrata*, I think they are in a way the best things I have ever done," he writes to his friend the priest, John Gray, who is now striving his hardest to win him into the Roman Catholic Church. Gray realises that the end is near. Beardsley planned that the *Lysistrata* should be printed in pale purple. . . . It was probable that Beardsley reached the *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes through the French translation of Maurice Donnay—he was so anxious to assert that the purple illustrations were to appear with the work of Aristophanes in book form, not with Donnay's translation! The *Lysistrata* finished, he turned to the translation and obscene illustration of the *Sixth Satire of Juvenal*.

But even before the month of July was out, he had to be packed off hurriedly to Pier View, Boscombe, by Bournemouth, where, in a sad state of health, he passed his twenty-fourth birthday. The place made his breathing easier, but the doctor is "afraid he cannot stop the mischief." Beardsley found relief in the *Juvenal* drawings! "I am beginning to feel that I shall be an exile from all nice places for the rest of my days," he writes pathetically. He loathed Boscombe.

With the July number, No. 3, *The Savoy* became a monthly magazine; and there is no doubt that its monthly appearance did much to arouse Beardsley to spurts of effort to make drawings, for he had an almost passionate love for the magazine. But this July that gave us the *Lysistrata* sequence only yielded

the lovely *Cover for the August Savoy*, No. 4—but what a cover! To think that Beardsley drew this beautiful design, of the lady beside a stand with grapes, beyond a gauze curtain, in the same month that he drew the *Lysistrata* sequence, and that it is the only design that could be published! It at least gives the world a hint of what it lost.

August at Boscombe yielded but the richly wrought *Cover* of the two figures near a Terminal god beside a dark lake for the September *Savoy*, No. 5, which he stupidly signed Giulio Floriani, and the uninteresting, commonplace wash-drawing in white on brown paper of *The Woman in White* which he had made from the *Bon Mots* line-drawings long before—there was now much searching amongst the drawings and scraps lying in the portfolio. But in spite of a racked body, the cover-design showed him at his most sumptuous employment of black and white.

It should be noticed that from his twenty-fourth birthday, after signing the farcical Giulio Floriani, he thenceforth signed his work with his initials A.B., in plain letters, usually in a corner of his drawing within, or without, a small square label. It is true that three drawings made after his twenty-fourth birthday bear his full name, but they were all made about this time. The Wagnerian musical drawings were most of them "in hand," but Smithers and Beardsley agreed that they should not be "unloaded" in a bunch, but made to trickle through the issues of *The Savoy* so as to prevent a sense of monotony—we shall see that, as the year ran out, they had to be "unloaded in a bunch" at the last. It is therefore not safe to date any Wagnerian drawings with the month of their issue. It is better to go by the form of signature. Then again Beardsley's hideous fight for life had begun, and Arthur Symons was in a difficulty as to how many drawings he might get from month to month, though there was always a Wagner to count upon as at least one. The signatures on the *Death of Pierrot* and the *Cover for the Book of Fifty Drawings* are the last signatures in full; and both were drawn in early September, soon after his birthday.

Beardsley unfortunately went up to London in this August on urgent business, and had a serious breakdown in consequence, with return of the bleeding from the lungs—a train journey always upset him. He had to keep his room at Boscombe for weeks. And he was in so enfeebled a state that the doctors decided to let him risk the winter at Boscombe, as he was now too

BOOKPLATE OF AUBREY BEARDSLEY

weak to travel to the South of France. A despairing cry escapes his lips again : " It seems I shall never be out of the wood."

The end of August and early September yielded the pathetic *Death of Pierrot* that seems a prophecy of his own near end, on which he was now brooding night and day. His strength failed him for a cover design, so the powerful *Fourth Tableau of " Das Rheingold "* had to be used as a cover for the *October Savoy*, No. 6. The *Death of Pierrot* is wonderful for the hush a-tiptoe of its stealthy-footed movement and the sense of the passing of Pierrot, as it is remarkable for the literary beauty of its simply written legend.

September brought snow to Boscombe, which boded ill for Beardsley's winter.

It was in this September that Smithers, " our publisher," opened his new offices at 4 and 5 Royal Arcade, Bond Street, whither he had moved from the first offices of *The Savoy* at Effingham House, Arundel Street, Strand ; and it was now from his office and shop in the Royal Arcade that he proposed to Beardsley the collecting of his best works already done, and their publication in an *Album of Fifty Drawings*, to appear in the autumn. The scheme, which greatly delighted Beardsley in his suffering state, held little terror or bad omen in its suggestion of the end of a career to a man who had himself just drawn the *Death of Pierrot*. It roused him to the congenial effort of drawing the *Cover for a Book of Fifty Drawings*. The fifty drawings were collected and chosen with great care and huge interest by Beardsley, and this makes it clear that he had drawn about this time, in or before September, the beautifully designed if somewhat suggestive *Bookplate of the Artist* for himself which appeared later as almost the last of the Fifty Drawings. In spite of Beardsley's excitement and enthusiasm, however, the book dragged on to near Christmas time, owing largely to the delay caused by the difficulties that strewed Vallance's path in drawing up and completing the iconography. It is a proof of the extraordinary influences which trivial and unforeseen acts may have upon a man's career that the moving of Smithers to the Royal Arcade extended Beardsley's public, as his latest work was at once on view to passers-by who frequented this fashionable resort.

The October of 1896 saw Beardsley draw the delightful *Cover for the November Savoy*, No. 7, of spectacled old age boring youth " by the book " (there was much chatter at this time over Ibsen's phrase, " Youth is knocking

at the gate"). Beardsley also wrote the beautiful translation, and made the even more beautiful and famous drawing, "*Ave atque Vale*," or Hail and Farewell! for the *Carmen CI of Catullus*, whilst the third illustration for the November *Savoy*, the small *Tristan and Isolde*, shows his interest maintained in the musical sequence that was ever present in his thoughts and which he intended to be gathered into book form. Indeed, the whole of this October Beardsley was at work writing a narrative version of Wagner's *Das Rheingold*, "most of the illustrations being already finished," as he himself testifies. Dent, to whom he had sent the drawing of *Tannhäuser returning to the Horselberg*, was trying to induce Beardsley at this time to illustrate the *Pilgrim's Progress* for him. This drawing of *Tannhäuser returning to the Horselberg* was evidently not considered good enough for publication in *The Savoy*, and is of indifferent quality. It had probably been one of the discarded efforts flung into the portfolio. The month of October had opened for Beardsley gay and cheerful over a bright fire and with books; it went out in terror for him. He fought hard to clamber from the edge of the grave that yawned, and he clutched at gravelly ground. A fortnight's bleeding from the lungs terrified him. "I am quite paralysed with fear," he cries—"I have told no one of it. It's so dreadful to be so weak as I am becoming. To-day I had hoped to pilfer ships and seashores from Claude, but work is out of the question." Yet before the last of October he was more hopeful again and took "quite a long walk and was scarcely tired at all afterwards. So my fortnight's bleeding does not seem to have done me much injury." His only distress made manifest was that he could not see his sister Mabel, about to start on her American theatrical tour.

November was to be rich in achievement for Aubrey Beardsley. It was to see him give to the world one of the most exquisite designs that ever came from his hands, a design that seems to sum up and crown the achievement of this great period of his art—he writes that he has just finished "rather a pretty set of drawings for a foolish playlet of Ernest Dowson's, *The Pierrot of the Minute*," which was published in the following year of 1897. A grim irony that a boredom should have brought forth such beauty! As he writes Finis to this work, he begs for a good book to illustrate! Yet on the 5th of this November a cry of despair escapes him: "Neither rest or fine weather seem to avail anything."

There is something pathetic in this eager search for a book to illustrate at a moment when Beardsley has achieved the faery of one design in particular of the several good designs in the *Pierrot of the Minute*, that " *cul-de-lampe* " in which Pierrot, his jesting done, is leaving the garden—the hauntingness of the thing wondrously enhanced by the dotted tracery of its enclosing framework—a tragic comment on the wonderful *Headpiece* when Pierrot holds up the hour-glass with its sands near run out. It is a sigh, close on a sob, blown across a sheet of white paper as by magic, rather than the work of human hands.

It was in this November that there appeared the futile essay on Beardsley by Margaret Armour which left Beardsley cold except for the appearance of his own *Outline Profile Portrait of himself in line*, " an atrocious portrait of me," which he seems to have detested for some reason difficult to plumb—it is neither good nor bad, and certainly not worse than one or two things that he passed with approval for *The Book of Fifty Drawings*. It is an almost incredibly tragic thought that the November of the *Pierrot of the Minute* was for Beardsley a month of terrible suffering. He had not left his room for six weeks. Yet, for all his sad state, he fervently clings to the belief that change will rid him of that gaunt spectre that flits about the shadows of his room. " I still continue in a very doubtful state, a sort of helpless, hopeless condition, as nobody really seems to know what is the matter with me. I fancy it is only change I want, that my troubles are principally nervous. . . . It is nearly six weeks now since I have left my room. I am busy with drawing & should like to be with writing, but cannot manage both in my weak state." He complains bitterly of the wretched weather. " I have fallen into a depressed state," and " Boscombe is ignominiously dull."

It was now that Beardsley himself saw, for the first time, his own designs for the cover and the title-page of *Evelina*—of his " own early designing."

The Savoy for December gives us some clue to the busy work upon drawings in November of which he speaks, but several of the drawings that then appeared were probably done somewhat before this time.

It was soon clear that the days of *The Savoy* were numbered; and the editor and publisher decided that the December number must be the last. The farewell address to the public sets down the lack of public support as the sole reason; but it was deeper than that. Beardsley, spurred to it by regret, put forth all his remaining powers to make it a great last number if it must be

so. For he drew one of the richest and most sumptuous of his works, the beautiful *A Repetition of Tristan and Isolde*—and he flung into the number all the drawings he now made or had made for *Das Rheingold*, which included the marvellously decorative *Frontispiece for the Comedy of The Rhinegold*, that "sings" with colour, and which he dated 1897, as he often post-dated his drawings, revealing that he had intended the long-cherished book on Wagner for the following year; but the other designs for the Comedy are the unimportant fragments *Flosshilde* and *Erda* and *Alberich*, which he, as likely as not, had by him, as it was in October that he had written of "most of the illustrations being finished." He now drew his two portraits of musicians, the *Mendelssohn* and the *Weber*; he somewhat disappoints with his *Don Juan, Sganarelle, and the Beggar* from that *Don Juan* of *Molière* which he had ever been eager to illustrate; he gives us the *Mrs. Margery Pinchwife* from Wycherley's *Country Wife*; he sadly disappoints us with his *Count Valmont* from Laclos's *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, for the illustration of which Beardsley had held out such high hopes; and he ends with *Et in Arcadia Ego.*

It does the public little credit that there was such scant support for *The Savoy* that it had to die. The farewell note to the last number announces that *The Savoy* is in future to be half-yearly and a much higher price. But it was never to be. After all, everything depended on Beardsley, and poor Beardsley's sands were running out.

Meantime he had been constantly fretting at the delay in the appearance of *The Book of Fifty Drawings* which he had completed in September, in spite of the date 1897 on the cover-design—an afterthought of Smithers, who as a matter of fact sent me an advance copy, at Beardsley's request, in December 1896.

The December *Savoy*, then, No. 8 and the last, saw Beardsley unload all his Wagnerian drawings. Through the month he was toying with the idea of illustrating translations of two of his favourite books, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, by Laclos, and Stendhal's *Adolphe.*

On a Sunday, early in December, he spent the afternoon "interviewing himself for *The Idler*"—the interview that appeared in that magazine, shaped and finished by Lawrence in March 1897.

About Christmas, however, his edition of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* was taking shape in his brain, with its scheme for initial letters to each of the 170

letters, and ten full-page illustrations, and a frontispiece to each of the two volumes; but it was to get no further than Beardsley's enthusiasm. At this Yuletide appeared *The Book of Fifty Drawings*, in which for the first time were seen the *Ali Baba in the Wood*, the *Bookplate of the Artist*, and the *Atalanta in Calydon with the Hound*. This book holds the significant revelation of Beardsley's own estimate of his achievement up to this time, for he chose his fifty best drawings; it holds therefore the amusing confession that he did not always know what was his best work. It is interesting to note that Beardsley includes the mediocre and commonplace *Merlin* in a circle, yet omits some of his greatest designs. It is all the more interesting in that Beardsley not only laid a ban on a considerable amount of his early work, but made Smithers give him his solemn oath and covenant that he would never allow to be published, if he could prevent it, certain definite drawings—he particularly forbade anything from the *Scrap-book* then belonging to Ross, for he shrewdly suspected Ross's malicious thwarting of every endeavour on Beardsley's behalf to exchange good drawings for these early commonplaces and inadequacies. And Smithers, to my certain knowledge, had in my presence solemnly vowed to prevent such publication. It is difficult to understand Ross's dogged obstinacy in retaining these early immature efforts of Beardsley's youth against Beardsley's constant entreaties. When Beardsley was dead, it is only fair to Smithers to say that he did resist the temptation until Ross basely over-persuaded him to the scandalous betrayal. However, that was not as yet. . . . Evidently, though the fifty drawings were selected and decided upon in September, Beardsley changed one October drawing for something thrown out, for the October *Ave atque Vale* appears; and it may be that the *Atalanta in Calydon with the Hound*, sometimes called *Diana*, and the Beardsley *Bookplate*, together with the *Self-portrait Silhouette* that makes the Finis to the Iconography, may have been done as late, and replaced other drawings. Beardsley dedicated the book of his collected achievement to the man who had stood by him in fair weather and in foul from the very beginning—Joseph Pennell. It was the least he could do.

December had begun with more hope for Beardsley—his lungs gave him little or no trouble; he "suffers from Boscombe more than anything else." And even though a sharp walk left him breathless, he felt he could scarcely call himself an invalid now; but the walk made him nervous. He is even looking forward to starting housekeeping in London again, with his sister; he hungers

for town; indeed would be "abjectly thankful for the smallest gaieties & pleasures in town." And were it not that he was nervous about taking walks abroad, he was becoming quite hopeful again when, taking a walk about New Year's Eve, he suddenly broke down; he "had some way to walk in a dreadful state" before he could get any help. And he began the New Year with the bitter cry: "So it all begins over again. It's so disheartening." He had "collapsed in all directions," and it was decided to take him to some more bracing place as soon as he was fit to be moved.

So ended the great *Savoy* period! Beardsley's triumphs seemed fated to the span of twelve moons.

THE LADY WITH THE MONKEY

IX

II. THE AQUATINTESQUES

Essays in Wash and Line

1897—Twenty-Five

WHEN the New Year of 1897 dawned, Beardsley was twenty-four and a half years of age—the great *Savoy* period at an end.

The Yuletide of 1896 had gone out; and the New Year of 1897 came in amidst manifold terrors for the plagued man. All hopes of carrying on *The Savoy* had to be abandoned. Beardsley's condition was so serious at the New Year that he had to be moved from Pier View to a house called "Muriel" in Exeter Road at Bournemouth, where the change seemed to raise his spirits and mend his health awhile. He was very funny about the name of his new lodgings: "I suffer a little from the name of this house, I feel as shy of my address as a boy at school is of his Christian name when it is Ebenezer or Aubrey," he writes whimsically. He began to find so much relief at "Muriel," notwithstanding, that he was soon planning to have rooms in London again—at Manchester Street.

By February he was benefited by the change, for he was "sketching out pictures to be finished later," and is delighted with Boussod Valadon's reproduction in gravure of his *Frontispiece* for Théophile Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, for which he was now making the half-dozen line and wash drawings, in the style of the old aquatint-engravers. These beautiful drawings done—scant wonder that he vowed that Boussod Valadon should ever after reproduce his works!—he employed the same craftsmanship for the famous *Bookplate for Miss Custance*, later the wife of Lord Alfred Douglas, also for the *Arbuscula* which he designed for Gaston Vuillier's *History of Dancing*. For sheer beauty of handling, these works reveal powers in Beardsley's keeping and reach which make the silencing of them by death one of the most hideous tragedies in art.

The music that they hold, the subtlety of emotional statement, and the sense of colour that suffuses them, raise Beardsley to the heights. It is a bewildering display of Beardsley's artistic courage, impossible to exaggerate, that he should have created these blithe masterpieces, a dying man.

Suddenly the shadows were filled with terrors again. The bleeding from his lung had almost entirely ceased when his liver started copious bleeding instead. It frightened the poor, distressed man dreadfully, and made him too weak and nervous to face anything. A day or two afterwards he was laughing at his fears of yesterday. A burst of sunshine makes the world a bright place to live in; but he sits by the fire and dreads to go out. "At present my mind is divided between the fear of getting too far away from England, & the fear of not getting enough sunshine, or rather warmth near home." But the doctors had evidently said more to Mrs. Beardsley than to her son; for his mother decided now and in future to be by Beardsley's side. Almost the last day of February saw his doctor take him out to a concert—a great joy to the stricken Beardsley—and no harm done.

In March he was struggling to draw against his failing body's fatigue. He also started a short story, *The Celestial Lover*, for which he was making a coloured picture; for he had bought a paint-box. March turned cold, and Beardsley had a serious set-back. The doctor pursed a solemn lip over his promise to let him go up to town—to Beardsley's bitter disappointment. The doctor now urged a move to the South—if only even to Brittany. Beardsley began to realise that the shadows in his room were again haunted: "I fancy I can count my life by months now." Yet a day or two later, "Such blessed weather to-day, trees in all directions are putting forth leaves." Then March went out with cold winds, and the bleeding began again, flinging the poor, distracted fellow amongst the terrors. He wrote from his bed and in pencil: "Oh, how tired I am of hearing my lungs creak all day, like a badly made pair of boots! . . . I think of the past winter and autumn with unrelieved bitterness." The move to London for the South was at last decided upon, for the first week in April—on the journey to the South of France by easy stages. He knew now that he could never be cured, but he hoped that the ravages of the disease could be prevented from becoming rapid.

On the 30th of March, in a letter to his friend John Gray, now even more eager to win him to the Church of Rome, he pleads that he ought to have the

right to beg for a few months more of life—" Don't think me foolish to haggle about a few months "—as he has two or three pictured short stories he wants to bring out; but on the following day, Wednesday the 31st of March, 1897, he was received into the Roman Catholic Church—on the Friday after, the 2nd of April, he took the Sacrament, which had to be brought to him, to his great grief, since he could not go to the church. He was to be a Roman Catholic for near upon a twelve-month. From this day of his entering the Church of Rome he wrote to John Gray as " My dear brother."

There is something uncanny in the aloofness of Beardsley's art from his life and soul. His art gives no slightest trace of spiritual upheaval. It is almost incredible that a man, if he were really going through an emotional spiritual upheaval or ecstasy, could have been drawing the designs for *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, or indeed steeping in that novel at all, or drawing the *Arbuscula*. For months he has been led by the friendship of the priest John Gray towards Holy Church; yet it is not six months since he has put the last touches on *Under the Hill*, and drawn the designs for *Lysistrata* and the *Juvenal!* not five months since he has drawn his *Bookplate!* And by the grim irony of circumstance he entered the Church of Rome in the same month that there appeared in *The Idler* his confession: " To my mind there is nothing so depressing as a Gothic Cathedral. I hate to have the sun shut out by the saints." This interview in the March *Idler* by Lawrence, one of the best interviewers of this time, who made the framework and then with astute skill persuaded Beardsley to fill in the details, was, as we know from Beardsley's own letters to his friend John Gray, written by himself about the Yuletide of the winter just departing. That interview will therefore remain always as an important evidence by Beardsley of his artistic ideals and aims and tastes. It is true that he posed and strutted in that interview; and, having despatched it, was a little ashamed of it, with a nervous " hope I have not said too many foolish things." But it is a baffling tribute to the complexity of the human soul that the correspondence with the poet-priest John Gray proves that whilst John Gray, whose letters are hidden from us, was leading Beardsley on his spiritual journey to Rome, Gray was lending him books and interesting him in books, side by side with lives of the saints, which were scarcely remarkable for their fellowship with the saints.

Beardsley was rapidly failing. On Wednesday, the 7th of April, a week

after joining the Church of Rome, he passed through London, staying a day or two at the Windsor Hotel—a happy halt for Beardsley, as his friend John Gray was there to meet him—and crossed to France, where on Saturday the 18th of April he wrote from the Hôtel Voltaire, Quai Voltaire, in Paris, reporting his arrival with his devoted mother. Paris brought back hope and cheerfulness to the doomed man. He loved to be in Paris; and it was in his rooms at this hotel that in May he was reading *The Hundred and One Nights* for the first time, and, inspired by it, drew his famous *Cover for Ali Baba*, a masterpiece of musical line, portraying a seated, obese, voluptuous Eastern figure resplendent with gems—as Beardsley himself put it, "quite a sumptuous design."

Beardsley had left Bournemouth in a state of delight at the prospect of getting to the South of France and the warmth and the sunshine. He felt that it would cure him and cheat the grave. In Paris he was soon able to walk abroad and to be out of doors again—perhaps it had been better otherwise, for he might then have gone further to the sun. There was the near prospect also of his sister Mabel Beardsley's return from America and their early meeting. He could now write from a café: "I rejoice greatly at being here again." And though he could not get a sitting-room at the hotel, his bed was in an alcove which, being shut off by a curtain, left him the possession by day of a sitting-room and thereby rid him of the obsession of a sick-room—he could forget he was a sick man. And though the hotel was without a lift, the waiters would carry him upstairs—he could not risk the climbing. And the bookshops and print-shops of Paris were an eternal joy to him.

With returning happiness he was eating and drinking and sleeping better. He read much of the lives of the saints; was comforted by his new religion; pondered upon works of piety, and—went on his way poring over naughtinesses. Still, he had thrust the threatening figure of death out of his room awhile—talked even of getting strong again quite soon.

But the usually genial month of May in Paris came in sadly for Beardsley, and the sombre threat flitted back into the shadows of his room again. He had the guard of an excellent physician, and the following day he felt well again; yet he begged Gray to pray for him. A month at St. Germain-en-Laye, just outside Paris, was advised; and Beardsley, going out to see the place, was delighted with its picturesqueness—indeed St. Germain-en-Laye was an ideal

place to inspire him to fresh designs. The Terrace and Park and the Hotel itself breathe the romance of the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries. Above all, the air was to make a new man of him.

Beardsley felt a pang at leaving Paris, where Gray had secured him the friendship of Octave Uzanne and other literary celebrities. And the railway journey, short as it was, to and from St. Germain, upset Beardsley as railway travelling always did. It cautioned care.

Before May was out, Beardsley moved out to St. Germain-en-Laye, where he found pleasant rooms at the Pavillon Louis XIV, in the rue de Pontoise. The place was a joy to him. But the last day of May drove him to consult a famous physician about his tongue, which was giving him trouble; the great man raised his hopes to radiant pitch by assuring him that he might get quite rid of his disease even yet—if he went to the mountains and avoided such places as Bournemouth and the South of France! He advised rigorous treatment whilst at St. Germain. However, his drastic treatment of rising at cockcrow for a walk in the forest and early to bed seems to have upset Beardsley's creaking body. The following day, the 1st of June, the bleeding of the lungs started again and made him wretched. The arrival of his sister, however, was a delight to him, and concerning this he wrote his delicious waggery that she showed only occasional touches of "an accent which I am sure she has only acquired since she left America." His health at once improved with his better spirits.

Beardsley read at St. Germain one of the few books by living genius of which we have any record of his reading, Meredith's *Evan Harrington*; it was about the time that the *Mercure* published in French the *Essay on Comedy*, which started widespread interest in the works of Meredith.

By mid-June Beardsley was greatly cheered; "everyone in the hotel notices how much I have improved in the last few days"; but his sitting out in the forest was near done. A cold snap shrivelled him, and lowered his vitality; a hot wave raised his hopes, only to be chilled again; and then sleep deserted him. On the 2nd of July he made a journey into Paris to get further medical advice; he had been advised to make for the sea and it had appealed to him. His hopes were raised by the doctor's confidence in the cure by good climates, and Beardsley decided on Dieppe. Egypt was urged upon him, but probably the lack of means forbade.

Thus, scarce a month after he had gone to St. Germain in high hopes, Beardsley on the 6th of July was ordered to Dieppe, whence he wrote of his arrival on the 12th of July at the Hôtel Sandwich in the rue Halle au Blé. He was now favoured with splendid weather and was out and about again; and he was reading and writing. Fritz Thaulow's family welcomed him back. He scarcely dares to boast of his improved health, it has seemed to bring ill-luck so often. But, best of all blessings, he was able to work. It was in this August that he met Vincent O'Sullivan, the young writer. Here he spent his twenty-fifth birthday. Before the month was half through he was fretting to be back in Paris for the winter. September came in wet and cold. He found this hotel rather exposed to the wind, and was taken to more sheltered lodgings in the Hôtel des Etrangers in the rue d'Aguado, hoping that Dieppe might still know a gentle September. Though the weather remained wet and cold, he kept well; but caution pointed to Paris. His London doctor came over to Dieppe on holiday, cheered him vastly with hopes of a complete recovery if he took care of himself, and advised Paris for the early winter. Beardsley, though eager for Paris, turned his back on Dieppe with a pang—he left many friends. However, late September saw him making for Paris with unfeigned joy, and settling in rooms at the Hôtel Foyot in the rue Tournon near the Luxembourg Gardens.

His arrival in his beloved Paris found Beardsley suffering again from a chill that kept him to his room; but he was hopeful. The doctor considered him curable still; he might have not only several years of life before him, "but perhaps even a long life." Unfortunately the scorching heat of the days of his arrival in Paris failed to shake him free of the chill. Still, the fine weather cheered him, and he was able to be much out of doors. Good food and turpentine baths aided; and—he was reading the *Memoirs of Casanova!* But he had grown cautious; found that seeing many people tired him; and begged for some "happy and inspiring book." But as October ran out, the doctors began to shake solemn heads again—all the talk was thenceforth of the South of France. "Every fresh person one meets has fresh places to suggest & fresh objections to the places we have already thought of. Yet I dare not linger late in Paris; but what a pity that I have to leave!" Biarritz was put aside on account of its Atlantic gales; Arcachon because pictures of it showed it horribly "Bournemouthy." The Sisters of the Sacré Cœur sent him a bottle of water

from Lourdes. "Yet all the same I get dreadfully nervous, & stupidly worried about little things." However, the doctors sternly forbade winter in Paris. November came in chilly, with fogs; and Beardsley felt it badly. The first week of November saw his mother taking him off southwards to the sun, and settled in the rooms at the Hôtel Cosmopolitain at Mentone, which was to be his last place of flitting.

Yet Beardsley left Paris feeling, as he delightedly wrote, "better and stronger than I have ever been since my school-days"; but the fogs that drove him forth made him write his last ominous message from the Paris that he loved so well: "If I don't take a decided turn for the better now I shall go downhill rather quickly."

At Mentone Beardsley felt happy enough. He liked the picturesque place. Free from hæmorrhage, cheered by the sunshine, he rallied again and was rid of all pains in his lungs, was sleeping well, and eating well; was out almost all day; and people noticed the improvement in him, to his great glee. And he was busying himself with illustrations for Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, and was keenly interested in a new venture by Smithers, who proposed a successor to *The Savoy* which he wished to call *The Peacock.*

The mountain and the sea suited Beardsley. "I am much happier and more peaceful," but "the mistral has not blown yet."

So, in this November of 1897, Beardsley, wrought for the *Cover of Volpone* one of the most wonderful decorative designs that ever brought splendour of gold on vellum to the cover of any book. He also made a pen-drawing for the *Cover of a Prospectus for Volpone*, which was after his death published in the book as a *Frontispiece*, for which it was in no way intended and is quite unfitted, and concerning which he gave most explicit instructions that it should not appear in the book, as he was done with the technique of it and had developed and created a new style for the book, wholly unlike it. All the same, it might have been used without hurt to the other designs, or so it seems to me, as a title-page, since *Volpone* is lettered on a label upon it. Nevertheless Beardsley never intended nor desired nor would have permitted that it should appear in the body of the book at all; for it is, as he points out, quite out of keeping with the whole style of the decorations. It was only to be employed as an attraction on the *Prospectus.* But in this *Prospectus Cover for Volpone* his hand's skill reveals no slightest hesitations nor weaknesses from his body's

sorry state—its lines are firmly drawn, almost to mechanical severity. And all the old marvellous suggestion of material surfaces is there, the white robe of the bewigged figure that stands with hands raised palm to palm suppliant-wise—the dark, polished wood of the gilt doorway—the fabric of the curtains—the glitter of precious metals and gems.

In a letter to "dear Leonardo" of this time he sent a "complete list of drawings for the *Volpone*," suggested its being made a companion volume to *The Rape of the Lock*, and asked Smithers to announce it in *The Athenæum*. Besides the now famous and beautiful "*Cover*," he planned twenty-four subjects, as he himself wrote to Smithers and as Smithers states in his dedication of *Volpone* to Beardsley's mother, though the fine initials which he did execute are, strangely enough, not even mentioned in that list. He reveals that the frontispiece is to be, like the design of the prospectus, "*Volpone and his Treasure*," but that it is to be in line and wash—obviously in the style of *The Lady and the Monkey*—yet, strangely enough, the remaining twenty-three subjects he distinctly puts down as being in "line"! And it is in this letter that he promises "a line-drawing for a prospectus in a few days," stating especially that it will be a less elaborate and line version of the proper *Frontispiece*—and that it is not to appear in the book. We have the line-drawing for the *Prospectus*—and we can only guess what a fine thing would have been this same design treated in the manner of *The Lady and the Monkey* or the *Initials*. That, in his list, twenty-three of the twenty-four designs were to be in line is a little baffling in face of the fact that the *Initials* were in the new method, line with pencil employed like a wash, and that Beardsley himself definitely states, as we shall see in a letter written on the 19th of this month, that the drawings are a complete departure in method from anything he had yet done, which the *Initials* certainly were.

On the 8th of December, Beardsley wrote to "friend Smithers," sending the *Cover Design for Volpone* and the *Design for the Prospectus of Volpone*, begging for proofs, especially of the *Design for the Prospectus*, "on various papers at once." Smithers sent the proofs of the two blocks with a present of some volumes of Racine for Beardsley's Christmas cheer. The beautiful *Miniature* edition of *The Rape of the Lock*, with Beardsley's special *Cover-design* in gold on scarlet, had just been published—the "little Rapelets" as Beardsley called them.

However, these twenty-four designs for the *Volpone* were never to be. But we know something about their general intention from a letter to Smithers, written on the 19th of December, which he begins with reference to the new magazine of *The Peacock* projected by Smithers, of which more later. Whilst delighted with the idea of editing *The Peacock*, Beardsley expresses fear lest the business and turmoil of the new venture may put the *Volpone* into second place, and he begs that it shall not be so, that there shall be no delay in its production. He evidently sent the *Initials* with this letter, for he underlines that *Volpone* is to be an important book, as Smithers can judge from the drawings that Beardsley is now sending him—indeed the *Initials* were, alas! all that he was ever destined to complete—the twenty-four illustrations were not to be. That these *Initials* were the designs sent is further made clear by the remark that the new work is a complete, "a marked departure as illustrative and decorative work from any other arty book published for many years." He pronounces in the most unmistakable terms that he had left behind him definitely all his former methods. He promised the drawings to be printed in the text by the first week in January, and that they should be "good work, the best I have ever done."

On the morrow of Christmas, Beardsley was again writing to Smithers, urging on the production of the *Prospectus for the Volpone*; and it is interesting to find in this Yuletide letter that the fine drawing in line and wash, in his aquatint style, of *The Lady and the Monkey*, was originally intended for the *Volpone*, and not for the set of the *Mademoiselle de Maupin* in which it eventually appeared, but was cast out of the "*Volpone*" by Beardsley, as "it will be quite out of keeping with the rest of the initials." So that the style of the *Initials* was clearly the method he had intended to employ for his illustrations.

What his remarkable creative fancy and dexterity of hand designed for the illustrations to *Volpone* only *The Lady and the Monkey* and the *Initials* can hint to us.

The sunshine and the warmth, the picturesque surroundings of the place, the mountains and the sea brought back hope; and again he clambered out of the grave. Languor and depression left him. He was on the edge of Yuletide and had known no cold or chill; indeed his only "grievance is mosquitoes." He would weigh himself anxiously, fearful of a setback at every turn.

Now, a fantastically tragic fact of Beardsley's strange career—a fact that Max Beerbohm alone of all those who have written upon Beardsley has noticed—was the very brief period of the public interest in him. Beardsley rose to fame at a bound—with *The Yellow Book*; he fell from the vogue with as giddy a suddenness. With the last number of *The Savoy* he had vanished from the public eye almost as though he had never been. The Press no longer recorded his doings; and his failure to keep the public interest with *The Savoy*, and all its superb achievement, left but a small literary and artistic coterie in London sufficiently interested in his doings to care or inquire whether he were alive or dead or sick or sorry, or even as to what new books he was producing. The *Book of Fifty Drawings* seemed to have written Finis to his career. Nobody realised this more, nor had better cause to realise it, than Leonard Smithers. It had been intended to continue *The Savoy* in more expensive form as a half-yearly volume; but Smithers found that it was hopeless as a financial venture—it had all ended in smoke. Smithers was nevertheless determined to fan the public homage into life again with a new magazine the moment he thought it possible. And the significance of the now very rare "newspaper cutting" had not been lost upon Beardsley himself. So it had come about that Smithers had planned the new magazine, to be called *The Peacock*, to appear in the April of 1898, to take the place of *The Savoy*; and had keenly interested Beardsley in the venture. For once Beardsley's *flair* for a good title failed him, and he would have changed the name of *The Peacock* to *Books and Pictures*, which sounded commonplace enough to make *The Peacock* appear quite good when otherwise it seemed somewhat pointless.

Beardsley's letter of the 19th of December to Smithers was clearly in reply to the urging of Smithers that Beardsley should be the editor of his new magazine *The Peacock* and that he should design the cover and whatever else was desired by Smithers. But Beardsley made one unswerving condition, and but one—that "it is quite *agreed that Oscar Wilde contributes nothing to the magazine, anonymously, pseudonymously or otherwise.*" The underlining is Beardsley's. Beardsley's detestation of Wilde, and of all for which Wilde stood in the public eye, is the more pronounced seeing that both men were to enter the Church of Rome with considerable publicity. Wilde was moving thitherwards, though he was not to be received until Beardsley was three years in his grave. However, though they became spiritually akin, Beardsley would

not have Wilde in any association with him at any price. . . . Before Beardsley leaves the subject of *The Peacock* he undertakes to design " a resplendent peacock in black and white " and reminds Smithers that he has " already some fine wash drawings " of his from which he can choose designs for the first number of the magazine. So that we at least know that this first number of *The Peacock* was to have had a resplendent peacock in black and white for its cover, and that it was to have been adorned with the beautiful decorations for *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, the supreme artistic achievement of Beardsley's resplendent skill. He outstripped in beauty of handling even his already exquisite craftsmanship; and it is the most tragic part of his tragedy of life that he was to die before he had given the world the further fulfilment of his fascinating artistry—leaving us wondering as to what further heights he might have scaled.

Beardsley knew full well that these drawings in line and wash, in his " aquatint " style, were his supreme achievement.

We know from a letter from Beardsley in this month that Smithers was still at his little office at No. 4, in the Royal Arcade, off Bond Street, whence Smithers sent me a coloured engraving of the *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, at Beardsley's request, which had been beautifully reproduced in a very limited edition. Though Beardsley himself realised his weakness in oil painting, he would have made a mark in water-colours, employed with line, like coloured engravings.

But the gods had willed that it should not be.

Beardsley always had the astuteness to give great pains and care to the planning of his prospectuses—he watched over them with fatherly anxiety and solicitude. But what is less known is the very serious part he played on the literary editor's side of the magazines of which he was art editor. And in his advice to Smithers concerning the new venture of *The Peacock*, he has left to us not only the astute conditions upon which he insisted to Smithers, but he reveals his own tastes and ideals in very clear terms. The magazine, as he wisely warns Smithers, should not be produced " unless you have piles of stuff up your editorial sleeves." And he proceeded to lay down with trenchant emphasis his ideals for the conduct of a magazine and, incidentally, his opinions of the art and literature of the day, revealing a shrewd contempt for the pushful mediocrities who had elbowed their way into the columns of *The*

Yellow Book and even *The Savoy*. "The thing," he writes, "must be edited with a savage strictness, and very definite ideas about everything get aired in it. Let us give birth to no more little backboneless babies. A little well-directed talent is in a periodical infinitely more effective than any amount of sporadic and desultory genius (especially when there is no genius to be got)." Beardsley gives in more detail his mature attitude towards literature : "On the literary side, impressionistic criticism and poetry and cheap short-storyness should be gone for. I think the critical element should be paramount. Let verse be printed very sparingly. . . . I should advise you to let Gelett Burgess do occasional things for us. Try to get together a staff. Oh, for a Jeffreys or a Gibbon, or anybody with something to say. . . ." And then we get in definite terms his sympathies and antipathies in art—"On the arts side, I suggest that it should attack *untiringly and unflinchingly* the Burne-Jones and Morrisian mediæval business, and set up a wholesome seventeenth- and eighteenth-century standard of what picture-making should be."

There we have Beardsley's whole range and also, be it confessed, his limitations. To the eighteenth century he owed all; and on the edge of eternity, unreservedly, frankly and honourably he made the solemn confession of his artistic faith.

X

THE END

1898

DECEMBER went out in "a pitiless drench of rain." It kept Beardsley indoors. A week of it gave place to the sunshine again, and his hopes were reborn.

So the Yuletide of 1897 came and went; and the New Year broke, with Beardsley dreaming restless dreams of further conquests.

In the early days of the New Year, the dying man's hopes were raised by the sight of "a famous Egyptologist who looks like a corpse, has looked like one for fourteen years, who is much worse than I am, & yet lives on and does things. My spirits have gone up immensely since I have known him. . . ." But the middle of the month saw the cold north-east wind come down on Mentone, and it blew the flickering candle of Beardsley's life to its guttering. After the 25th of January he never again left his room. February sealed his fate. He took to his bed, from which he arose but fitfully, yet at least he was granted the inestimable boon of being able to read. The Egyptologist also took to his bed—a bad omen for Beardsley. By the end of February the poor, plagued man had lost heart—he felt the grave deepening and could not summon the will any further to clamber out of it.

The sands in the hour-glass of Pierrot were running low. It was soon a fearful effort to use his beloved pen. Anxious to complete his designs and decorations for the *Volpone*, and remembering the pushing forward of the *Prospectus* that he had urged on the publisher, he had fallen back on the pencil—as the elaborately drawn *Initial Letters* show—for each of the scenes in *Volpone*, employing pencil with the consummate tact and beauty of craftsmanship that had marked his pen line and his aquatintesques in line and wash. Whatever dreams he had of full-page illustrations in line and wash they had now to be abandoned. Just as in his Great Period of *The Savoy* he had come

nearer to nature, and had discovered the grass on the fields and flowers in the woods to be as decorative under the wide heavens as they were when cut in glasses "at Goodyear's" in the Royal Arcade; just as he had found that fabrics, gossamer or silk or brocade, were as decorative as were flat black masses; just as he found intensely musical increase in the orchestration of his line as he admitted Nature into his imagination; so now he came still nearer to Nature with the pencil, and his Satyr as a terminal god illumined by the volume of atmosphere and lit by the haunting twilight, like his Greek column against the sky, took on quite as decorative a form as any flatness of black or white in his Japanesque or Greek vase-painting phases. But as his skilled fingers designed the new utterance to his eager spirit, the fragile body failed him—at last the unresponsive pencil fell from his bloodless fingers—his work was done.

As Beardsley lay a-dying on the 7th March, nine days before he died he scribbled with failing fingers that last appeal from the Hôtel Cosmopolitain at Mentone to his friend the publisher, Leonard Smithers, that he himself had put beyond that strange man's power to fulfil—even had he had the will—for "the written word remains," and, printed, is scattered to the four winds of heaven:

Jesus is our Lord & Judge

Menton.

Dear Friend,

I implore you to destroy all copies of *Lysistrata* & bad drawings. Show this to Pollitt and conjure him to do same. By all that is holy—all obscene drawings.

Aubrey Beardsley.
In my death agony.

But this blotting out was now beyond any man's doing. The bitter repentance of the dying Beardsley conforms but ill with the canting theories of such apologists as hold that Beardsley was a satirist lashing the views of his age. Beardsley had no such delusions, made no such claims, was guiltless of any such self-righteousness. He faced the stern facts of his own committing; and almost with the last words he wrote he condemned the acts of his hands that had sullied a marvellous achievement—and he did so without stooping to any attempt at palliation or excuse. His dying eyes gazed unflinchingly at the

A KEY TO THE DATES OF WORKS BY AUBREY BEARDSLEY ACCORDING TO THE STYLE OF HIS SIGNATURE

Puerilia

Mid-1888, he comes to town

Juvenilia

Mid-1889 to mid-1891, blank of achievement

Formative Period—Burne-Jonesesques

Mid-1891 to mid-1892

During these three periods, up to mid-1892, Beardsley signs with three initials, A. V. B.

Mediævalism and the Hairy Line Japanesques

The *Morte d'Arthur* and *Bon Mots*

Mid-1892 to mid-1893

Begins the " Japanesque mark "—the *stunted* mark.

In the spring of 1893, with the coming of *The Studio*, and the ending of this period, Beardsley cuts the V. out of his initials and out of his signature. He now signs A. B. or A. Beardsley or Aubrey B. in ill-shaped " rustic " capitals, when he does not employ the " Japanesque mark "—even sometimes when he does employ it.

" Salome "

Mid-1893 to the New Year 1894

The " Japanesque mark " becomes longer, more slender, and more graceful.

" The Yellow Book " or Greek Vase Period

From the New Year 1894 to mid-1895

In the middle of this period—that is, in mid-1894—he signs the " Japanesque mark " for the last time.

The Great Period

I. " *The Savoy* " and II. " *Aquatintesques* "

Mid-1895 to Yuletide 1896 1897

From mid-1895 Beardsley signs in plain block capitals, right up to the end—the only difference being that in the last phase of the *Aquatintesque line and wash* work with the few line-drawings of this time, that is from mid-1896, he signs as a rule only the initials A. B. in plain block capitals, but now usually *in a corner of his design*, either in or without a small square label.

truth—and the truth was very naked. The jackals who had egged him on to base ends and had sniggered at his obscenities, when his genius might have been soaring in the empyrean, could bring him scant comfort as he looked back upon the untidy patches of his wayfaring; nor were they the likely ones to fulfil his agonised last wishes—indeed, almost before his poor, racked body was cold they were about to exploit not only the things he desired to be undone, but, far, far worse for his repute as artist, they were raking together for their own profit the earlier crude designs that they knew full well Beardsley had striven his life long to keep from publication owing to their wretched mediocrity of craftsmanship.

On the sixteenth day of the March of 1898, at twenty-five years and seven months, his mother and his sister by his side, the racked body was stilled, and the soul of Aubrey Beardsley passed into eternity.

The agonised mother who had been his devoted companion and guardian throughout this long twelve-month of flitting flight from death, together with his beloved sister, Mabel Beardsley, were present at the Cathedral Mass; and "there was music." So the body of Aubrey Beardsley was borne along the road that winds upwards, long and steep, from the cathedral to the burial place that "seemed like the way of the Cross—it was long and steep, and we walked." They laid him to rest in a grave "on the edge of the hill . . . hewn out of the rock, . . . a true sepulchre with an arched opening and a stone closing it," so that they who took their last walk beside him "thought of the sepulchre of the Lord."

HAIL AND FAREWELL!

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Macfall, Haldane

Aubrey Beardsley